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KING OF THE WITCHES

The World of Alex Sanders



June Johns

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Complacency serves the old gods.

By the same author

The Grasshopper Boy

Zoo Without Bars

King of the Witches:

The World of Alex Sanders

JUNE JOHNS

With photographs by
JACK SMITH



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Glossary

ATHAME	The witch's black-hilted knife.
BOOK OF SHADOWS	With book of rules, written in witch's own handwriting and copied by successive generations.
COVEN	Group of witches.
COVENSTEAD	Meeting place of a coven
ESBAT	Small meeting, not necessarily of a full coven.
ESP	Extra-sensory perception
FAMILIAR	A mass of energy or power raised by the witches and sent to work their will.
FITH-FATH	Small image made of clay or plasticine to represent a person on whom a restraint is to be worked.
THE KEY OF SOLOMON	Ancient Hebrew book of magic.
MEASURE	Length of cord measuring a witch's height at the time of his initiation. Sometimes held as a 'hostage' by the coven leader.
PENTACLE	Originally a five-sided figure but now any circular piece of metal inscribed with witch symbols.
SABBAT	Major meeting of whole coven or several covens.
TAROT CARD	Cards used in predicting the future.
VOODOO	Primitive form of religion practised by negroes of Haiti and elsewhere in the West Indies and America.
WARLOCK	Originally the witch who bound the initiate, but used only by non-witches to describe a male-witch.
WICCA	Ancient word for witchcraft.
WITCH	Initiated male or female member of witchcraft group.
WIZARD	Magician, not necessarily a witch.

Introduction

Since the dawn of history man has believed in miracles. The first tribesmen to discover the healing power of herbs, or to recognize clouds as the forerunners of rain, were elected magi, or wise men. From this it was but a short step to divining the future and to the formulation of spells to increase fertility or destroy enemies.

As long ago as the Stone Age the wise man of the tribe was dressed in an animal skin; he was called 'devil', which meant 'little god', and was worshipped by his followers as the chief god's representative. The earliest record of this custom is a palaeolithic painting found in a cave in the Ariège district of southern France. It depicts a man clad in a stag's skin, with antlers on his head—the Horned God, a symbol of benevolent power in primitive times. Another, a man disguised as a jackal, carved on slate, dates back to archaic Egypt.

In about 1100 B.C. women and officers of the harem of Rameses III were brought to trial for making wax images of the Pharaoh to the accompaniment of magic incantations. These images were fith-faths, still used by witches today against their enemies.

History shows that, as a new religion succeeds the old, the

gods of the latter are invariably condemned as the devils of the former, and it was thus that the pagan god became the Christian devil. In spite of this, Christianity and witchcraft co-existed peaceably for centuries. In Britain, for instance, London was still heathen six hundred years after the birth of Christ, and although Augustine managed to convert the King of Kent to Christianity, the rest of the country preferred pagan rites of witchcraft.

But as the 'establishment' became Christian, the old religion fell into disrepute, and in A.D. 668 the Archbishop of Canterbury ruled that people who ate and drank in heathen temples, or wore the heads of beasts, should do three years' penance. The witches continued to use the stag's horns, however. Their only concession was to meet secretly, on moors or in lonely forests. These meetings were known as 'sabbats'.* After homage had been paid to the devil, usually present in the guise of a black goat, or his deputy, the witches held a banquet. This was followed by the main feature of the sabbat, the dance, the tempo of which was often raised to a frenzy in preparation for the final climax of sexual orgy.

It is important to note at this point that although we have few historical records of 'white' witches at this time and must include them under the general term 'witches', modern white witches, who are the subject of this book, believe that they are descended from, and adhere to, a separate tradition embracing the worship not of Satan, but of the Horned God and the Earth Mother—symbol of fertility, the oldest goddess known to man. Certain aspects of white-witch dogma can be traced in ancient religions all over the world, in Druidical beliefs, for instance, and the incantations in Runic have been passed from generation to generation. White witchcraft is invariably confined to doing good, restraining evil and promoting fertility.

But although some attempt was made in the Middle Ages

* Often confused, erroneously, with the term 'coven'. The latter is much more recent and refers to the basic organizational grouping of thirteen witches—six couples and a leader, or eleven priests, a high priest and high priestess.

to distinguish between beneficial and harmful magic, it had little effect on the treatment of the witches themselves. From being a joyous religion, witchcraft was changed overnight when, in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII put his seal on the Bull that condemned witches as heretics for interfering with fertility. From now on terror would invade the life of anyone suspected of working miracles.

In 1486, two members of the Inquisition, with the full approval of the Pope, wrote and had published the book *Malleus Maleficarum*, which described in considerable detail methods of discovering and punishing witches and ways in which magic could be harmful. The book, which by 1520 had run to fourteen editions, confirmed popular misconceptions and hostility towards witchcraft and was to influence public opinion in Europe until after the Reformation (Protestants were even greater witch-haters than their predecessors).

One of the first countries to declare war on witches had been France, where they were burnt at the stake several decades before the Papal Bull. At that time whole villages still followed the old religion and even the priests, who were mostly drawn from the peasant class, were only outwardly Christian. Having tried to stamp out witchcraft by persuasion, the clergy, backed by civil law, overcame it by force—the same fate as had befallen the ancient religions of Egypt and of the Aztecs.

In England tolerance had prevailed until the arrival of the inquisitors. At first the law forbade them to use torture, but nevertheless rumour and terror were rife in every village. The clergy claimed that all witches had made a pact with the Devil who, in return, gave them a 'familiar', usually in the form of a domestic animal, to run errands for them and bewitch their enemies. At a time when most people believed that the earth was flat, it was not difficult to imagine such evil properties in any obedient animal, especially if its owner were unsociable and lived alone. (Spiteful women are not confined to the twentieth century; they abounded in medieval Europe!)

As the activities of the witch-hunters increased, Henry VIII himself decided to profit by it. In 1542 a law was passed not only condemning witches to death but confiscating their lands and money. All over the country men and women were dragged from their homes on the flimsiest evidence. In Kent a mother and daughter were condemned to death for 'feeding and employing an evil spirit in the likeness of a black dog'. Although torture was ostensibly still forbidden, witches could be 'tested'. Naked, with arms crossed and thumbs tied to their big toes, they were flung into the nearest deep water. If they sank they were innocent—but usually they were dead by the time they were hauled out. If they could swim it was certain proof of their guilt, and they could be hanged after what was only the formality of a trial.

Queen Elizabeth went further than her father; she had an Act passed condemning anyone who, by witchcraft, tried to foresee how long she would reign and who would be her successor.

The time of the terror left no one secure. If they were seen out at night with strange men, young girls would be brought before the magistrates. 'Her companion had cloven hoofs,' the accusers would cry, or, 'A tail hung beneath his cloak.' No amount of denials could spare a girl the agony of being stripped naked, after which the hair would be shaved from all parts of her body and local crones would poke and prod her, looking for warts, tumours or protuberances.* Doctors today know that supernumerary nipples, occurring in both men and women on almost any part of the body, are common and harmless. At the time of the Inquisition, however, and for some time after, they meant certain death to their owner, for any such blemish was automatically regarded as the Devil's Mark—used by a witch to suckle her familiar. When a 'witch' was warned she might be arrested, she would often amputate a potential Devil's Mark with the kitchen knife, preferring

* Or, at the start of the terror, for the mark of the three-nailed claw, known as the Witch's Mark, with which witches used to tattoo their converts. Not surprisingly this custom was soon discontinued.

the threat of death from haemorrhage or blood-poisoning to that of execution.

Another certain proof was the finding of a spot that was insensible to pain and that did not bleed when stabbed with a pin. The Scots developed this method to such a fine art that some cities in England hired experts from across the border to conduct their witch-hunts for them.

In 1649 the town bell-ringer of Newcastle-on-Tyne was sent round the streets to gather accusations against supposed witches. Within a few hours thirty women were forced to go into the town hall and, one by one, were stripped naked. Their faces covered, they were stretched out on the draughty floor and, watched by a jeering mob, had pins up to three inches long stuck into them. The expert, who was being paid twenty shillings for every proven witch, seemed to be having a good day, for none of the women was able to say exactly where in her numbed flesh the needles had been stuck. Fortunately a more enlightened witness, a Lt-Col. Hobson, refused to accept this proof and demanded that the women be allowed to stand so that their blood could flow freely. Their subsequent screaming lost the bounty-hunter his fee and gave them back their freedom.

In 1662 so many people had died from the results of being 'pricked' that the custom was dropped and replaced by gentler forms of persuasion, such as denial of sleep. The suspect was put upon a wooden stool in the centre of the room so that she could not rest her back. Her captors took it in turn to cross-examine her day and night, without respite. In addition they kept watch for any spiders, mice or flies, since they might be Satan's agents come to help her. If something did appear and the gaolers could not catch it, they regarded it as proof that it was the devil's messenger. By the time the woman had sat on the stool for twenty-four hours without food, water or rest, she was usually ready to confess to anything. The fact that she might recant later was not much help to her; her gaolers could always embroider their evidence with accounts of their valiant attempts to catch Satan's imps.

Perhaps because they led such wretched lives, children were often the first to accuse their parents. One testimony was sufficient to hang a person. A child who felt he had been unjustly punished might run to the village gossip with the news that his mother had been visited by an owl at dead of night. The fact that the owl had nested outside his home ever since he could remember would be conveniently ignored, and if the child repented and tried to tell the truth when he saw his mother being taken off to gaol, everyone would nod sagely and agree that the poor child had been bewitched. Nine women were condemned at Leicester on the evidence of a single boy who claimed they had bewitched him, and at Lancaster in 1612 the court accepted the evidence of a nine-year-old.

Not every witch denied the charges; many went into great detail about the spells they had worked, and were proud to be named. These same prisoners went to the gallows almost gaily, just as much martyrs to their religion as the early Christians who were thrown to the lions.

Despite the vivid imagination of witnesses, the credulity of the public that encouraged them to believe the fantastic lies they were told, and the general fear of witchcraft, many judges refused to accept the evidence even when it included a confession. An average of 20 per cent of the accused were found guilty and executed; the others were either let off with a year in gaol—which could amount to a death sentence in those unsanitary days—or were set free.

Witch mania did not develop in England until the second half of the sixteenth century. Between 1542 and 1684 about a thousand people were executed for witchcraft, the most dangerous period being from 1598 to 1607 when 41 per cent of those charged were sent to the gallows. In Scotland, where the terror flourished more strongly, the number of executions was considerably higher. These are not figures to be proud of, but they are puny when compared with those of the rest of Europe where, according to church authorities, in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries over 250,000 people died at the stake for practising witchcraft.

The law, the church and the state felt no guilt; like the early map-makers who, knowing that none might prove them wrong, labelled unexplored territory 'Here Be Dragons', they preferred to condemn inexplicable phenomena rather than admit they were baffled. Better to blame the devils they knew than let the public suspect there might be greater devils as yet undreamed of.

The last person in England to die for being a witch was Alice Mollard of Exeter, who was hanged in 1684. In 1736 the Act of James I was repealed. It now became illegal to prosecute for witchcraft, sorcery or enchantment. Instead, anyone claiming to be able to work magic by witchcraft could be sent to prison for a year, during which he had to spend a whole day per quarter in the pillory of the nearest market square.

The persecutors and witch-prickers had done their work well. The books of magic, or 'grimoires' as they were called, were seized upon by collectors—many of the witches' closest secrets were discovered in *The Key of Solomon*, a copy of which is preserved in the British Museum. Clutching the remnants of their faith, the survivors of the witch-hunts went underground. But not for long.

Eliphas Levi was born in France in 1810. Roman Catholic priest and magician, Levi was not ashamed to announce that he was a witch and could conjure up spirits. Later he revealed his methods to an English occult group led by Bulwer Lytton, the novelist. Soon half a dozen similar societies had sprung up. The members dabbled in magic and witchcraft, black and white, the former for revenge and even murder, the latter for healing, divination and self-preferment. By the time Levi died in 1875, he had paved the way for a renaissance in witchcraft.

Aleister Crowley was born in the same year and he came to consider himself the reincarnation of Levi. When Crowley was in his twenties he joined the Society of the Golden Dawn, of which W. B. Yeats was a member, and he became a skilled magician. Before long he was recognized as an incurable practitioner of black witchcraft, by which means he indulged

his sexual appetites and his craving for power. Although he made a mockery of their laws with his orgies and his use of heroin he is still acknowledged and respected by many English witches. Known as 'The Great Beast', he wrote a textbook on magic, *Magick in Theory and Practice*. He died in 1947.

The man who perhaps most influenced the revival of witchcraft in England in this century was Gerald Gardner, who was born in 1884. Gardner was initiated into the first grade of the cult by a witch called 'Daffo' in the New Forest, and he proceeded to recruit many covens in spite of his not having received initiation into the second and third grades. By diligent study of ancient Hebrew and Egyptian manuscripts, he devised his own rituals. In 1950 he set up a Witchcraft Museum in the Isle of Man where he exhibited his collection of witch weapons. He died in 1964. Today, 'Gardnerian' witches are considered novices by hereditary witches who learnt their rituals from records handed down from generation to generation; they are accepted as legitimate witches, but only of the first grade.

The repeal in 1951 of the old Witchcraft Act releasing witches from the fear of persecution did much to help the revival of the cult, but those covens operated by hereditary witches claim to have met consistently throughout the centuries. Alexander Sanders himself is descended from a long line of Welsh witches and was initiated as a child by his grandmother. He is essentially a professional white witch, though he has experimented with black witchcraft, knows its dangers, and has experienced the difficulty of returning to the 'true' cult after having flouted its laws. In 1965 he was elected 'King of the Witches', a title last held in the fifteenth century by Owain Glyndwr, the last independent Prince of Wales, from whom Sanders believes he is descended. Quite apart from his title, however, he is unique in that he has set himself the task of making his religion respectable, a herculean labour in view of the factions and frictions inherent in so bizarre a fringe religion.

This book is not intended as a study of witchcraft; a number

of competent writers have already dealt with this subject—Dr Margaret Murray, for one, in her *Witch Cult in Western Europe*. I have merely attempted to portray the world of Alex Sanders, to describe the life and activities of one of the most powerful living witches and to gauge the appeal of witchcraft to thousands of ordinary men and women.

My own position with regard to the phenomenon is that I would no more become a witch than I would a parachutist—and for the same reason: fear. Even looking into my own future holds no attraction for me. That witches can see the future—or part of it—I have no doubt. That they can alter its course, I prefer to deny. Witches have no monopoly of wisdom and the only common denominator amongst them is the joy they find in their god.

Reared first as a nonconformist and then as an Anglican, I was taught early to fear God. Later in life, when I was exposed to high-powered evangelism, I found that He could be a jolly good fellow when pleased and a thunderer when thwarted. But none of this prepared me for the utter naturalness of the relationship between the witch and his god; it is one of love and understanding. Without artifice or hypocrisy, the witches I met were truly pious.

When I consider their ways of worship, in particular the nude rites that appear to be so ludicrously out of place in religion, I find I must rethink my attitude towards more familiar religions. To an agnostic, is the calling down of the moon any more absurd than the act of genuflecting? Is the lighting of a candle to a long-dead saint more credible than tying cords round a wax image? Is the immaculate conception more easily believed than a vision in a bowl of water?

I have drawn no conclusions beyond this: for those like me who prefer their spirits mixed with soda, witchcraft affords a fascinating glimpse into another world; but for those who are drawn to the supernatural, who are prepared to devote time and trouble to it, witchcraft offers no less than the power to achieve a new dimension of life.

1 The Young Initiate

There was nothing about the day to suggest it would change the course of his life and influence him until the day he died. It was grey and cheerless, like many other days in Manchester, and Alex was an undersized seven-year-old passing through mean back streets on his way from St George's Primary School in Hulme to the home of his grandmother.

The Sanders family had recently moved to a semi-detached house—No. 2 Stratton Road, Chorlton—a great improvement over the old Victorian house near the central goods yard in Manchester, where mother, father and three children had had to make do in one room. But living in a better-class district had its drawbacks. The rent was high and Mrs Sanders had taken a charring job to eke out her husband's wage.

Small—barely five-foot—and wiry, Hannah Sanders was determined to raise her children above their environment. When first married ten years previously she and her husband had been comfortably off. He had been a musician and for five years or so she travelled with him. When their first child Alex was born, he too made the tour of the music halls and theatres. Soon, however, Harold Sanders became increasingly

addicted to alcohol, and during an engagement in Argyllshire he appeared on the stage drunk. He was instantly dismissed. His reputation preceded him—never again was he able to get work in the theatre. He became a hod-carrier and the family rented the terraced house in Grape Street, Manchester, until they had saved enough to move to Chorlton.

Now it was one long struggle to keep heads above water. Harold took private pupils for lessons on the cornet, and sometimes worked for prize brass or silver bands at week-ends. But frequently he took refuge in drink, distressing his wife and terrifying his children.

Hannah reassured them about their father's 'illness'. She regaled them with stories of their paternal great-grandfather who had been captain of a tea clipper. (She never mentioned that he had been captured by Chinese pirates and buried alive.) She cleaned for a tailor in Chorlton who had a son the same size as Alex, and once every six months she agreed to forgo her wages of 3s. 6d. a week in return for a parcel of clothes outgrown by the tailor's son. The family lived on bread and dripping those weeks, but Alex was warmly shod and well dressed for another half-year.

His Grandma Bibby had moved from her birthplace, Bethesda in North Wales, to be near her daughter. Widowed for many years, she was now sixty-six and had dark hair which, she boasted, she could sit on. As a girl she had been in service with Lord Penrhyn and had learnt to be an excellent cook. Alex enjoyed visiting her for that reason, but she was still very much a stranger, having moved to the district only months before.

On this particular day Alex was tired and hungry, and feeling a little sorry for himself. Why couldn't his mother be like other mothers, be at home waiting for him? He resented being sent to Gran's to ask if she would give him his tea. Usually his mother finished work soon after three, but today she was working late.

No. 46 Wilton Road was a terraced family house with an alley separating it from its neighbour at ground level. Instead

of ringing the front-door bell, Alex went round to the back to surprise Prince the collie, who lived in the yard and was always ready for a rough-and-tumble. Today the yard door was open and the dog was not there. Gran always preferred people, even relatives, to knock, but the small boy forgot this and walked right in through the back door.

The sight that met his eyes in the kitchen dumbfounded him. An old, old woman, with wrinkled belly and match-stick thighs, stood in the centre of the room surrounded by a cloth circle on which curious objects had been placed. Only when she spoke did he recognize his grandmother.

'What are you doing here?' she snapped. 'Who sent you?'

Unable to tear his eyes away, the boy stammered his mother's message.

'I'll give you your tea, all right,' his grandmother said grimly. 'But first, come over here.'

Fearfully the child went towards her, shrinking from contact with the sallow wrinkled flesh and the flowing black hair which, released from its pins, did indeed hang to below her waist.

'Take off your clothes,' she commanded, and when he hesitated after removing his coat and shoes, added, 'All of them—every last stitch.'

Teeth chattering with fright, he peeled off his vest and pants and stood there like a lamb about to be slaughtered. The old lady bent down and picked up a small sickle-shaped knife from the edge of the circle surrounding her.

'I'm going to make sure that you never tell another living soul what you have seen this day,' she whispered. 'If you so much as breathe one word of it, I'll kill you.'

'I won't, Gran, honest I won't,' cried the boy, cowering before her.

'Bend over,' she said, and forced his shoulders towards his knees. There was a searing pain and the boy felt blood trickle down from his scrotum.

'You can stand up now.' She let go of him and dried the blood from the knife. 'You're one of us now, and all the power

of heaven and earth will strike you if you break your promise. Don't look so scared, lad—' she realized suddenly that he was white and shaking—'you'll live to thank me for this. I'll teach you things you never heard of, how to make magic and see the future.'

Instead of being comforted, Alex was even more terrified.

'You're not a . . . witch?' he whispered, remembering fairy tales about old hags who could turn children into toads.

'Of course I'm a witch, and so are you now.'

She handed him his clothes and, while they both dressed, told him how, through the ages, witches had been feared, slandered and burnt at the stake. She spoke of the power of healing learnt by the witches, and of the stupendous ignorance of non-believers who preferred to suffer rather than be cured by a witch.

'You, too, may be persecuted,' she warned, 'which is why you must work in secret, as I have done ever since my grandmother taught the magic to me as a child.'

She sat him in her best armchair beside the black lead grate while she cleared away the circle with its strange designs and started making the tea. Alex looked cautiously round the large well-furnished kitchen. Over the mantelpiece was draped a red chenille cloth fringed with tiny bobbles and there were others on the deal Welsh dresser and the tea table. Now that the circle had been removed together with the brass bowls and other strange objects, there was nothing to show that this was not an ordinary kitchen—nothing except the small knife that had cut him and a pair of swords on the dresser.

Gran followed his gaze and went to put the weapons in the bottom cupboard of a chest on the far side of the room. As she opened its door, she demonstrated the elaborate double-lock.

'It's a fine piece of furniture,' she said. 'My grandfather used to drive the stage-coach from Bangor to London and he had this strong chest specially made to house the silver he had collected.'

Alex knelt beside her as she took from the cupboard a crystal ball and a black-hilted knife.

'This is my athame,' she said, showing him the knife. 'When you are old enough to be a fully fledged witch, you shall have one too.'

Alex was not sure that he wanted one; he preferred the crystal which reflected the black and red tiles on the floor and the cheerful glow from the fire. But his grandmother would not let him hold it for more than a minute. 'You'll make it cloudy,' she told him. 'Later I'll teach you how to use it, but you've had enough for one day. Now come and get your tea.'

It would be years before he discovered that he was the last of a line of witches dating back to the fifteenth century; that the initiation from which he was still smarting was a pale replica of those once carried out in Sparta when males were emasculated so as to become priests of the moon goddess.

Ages would pass before he tried turning his powers to evil to gain himself a fortune; before his misuse of them lost him the person he loved. This was 1933 and Alex Sanders was just a bewildered child who believed he and his grandmother were the last two witches left unburnt.

2 A Magic Childhood

Left to himself, Alex might have ended his foray into witchcraft there and then, but family circumstances forced him into contact with his grandmother almost daily and before long he found himself becoming interested and then totally absorbed in the secret teachings. A quick learner—he had been able to read at the age of three—he was never fully extended by his school work and had no difficulty maintaining his place at the top of the class. After school, when he had finished peeling potatoes and running errands for his mother, he would ask to go to Gran's for his lessons in Welsh. Hannah was sadly out of practice herself and was glad that her son was so keen to speak a second language.

Alex did in fact have Welsh lessons—but only for half an hour. After that the witch regalia was brought out and the boy was taught the meaning of each item; the runic symbols dating back thousands of years when prophets cast sticks into the air and, from the pattern they made in landing, foretold the future; the inscriptions on the witches' dagger—the kneeling man, the kneeling woman, the bare breasts touching, the arrow speeding through the wheel of life down into the pointed blade, ready to strike at its owner's bidding; the

miniature whip, a harmless substitute for the earlier weapon with which members were scourged, sometimes to the point of death; and the glistening crystal, which fascinated him most of all.

He learnt by heart the meaningless chants in a long-dead language, and at the end of the lesson he would take a small brass bowl of water and darken it with ink. He squatted on the floor by the light of the fire, the bowl before him. At first he could see only the flickering reflection of the coals, but Gran urged him to have patience. 'It will come,' she said confidently. And it did. One day, long after he had given up hope of ever seeing anything, the reflections seemed to mist over. When they cleared, his mother was looking up at him from the ink. She was lying on a bed and beside her leg, splashed with blood, was a new-born baby, its umbilical cord uncut. Three months later Hannah Sanders gave birth to her fourth child, Patricia.

Visions did not always confine themselves to the bowl. Alex was playing in the schoolyard one day when another boy suddenly appeared to him to have a double image, as if out of focus, and the fainter image revealed the boy's left leg in plaster.

'You're going to break your leg,' Alex exclaimed. The boy, who was bigger than Alex, didn't take kindly to this and promptly thumped him. Several weeks later he fell off a swing—and broke his left leg.

After that Alex was careful to hold his tongue when his friends appeared in his visions. Once, for instance, a 'picture' appeared in his mind of a schoolmate's mother being taken to hospital in an ambulance, but there was little he could do to warn her. Not long after she had to have an appendix operation.

On another occasion he saw a white-haired man whom he had never met. Weeks later he and two friends, Alan and David, raided a local soft-drinks factory. They climbed up a back wall, crawled across a steeply pitched roof and dropped into the inner yard where the crates were piled ready for

delivery. The three boys each grabbed a bottle and made off the way they had come. Once in the street, David told Alex to go back and fetch another bottle. But Alex was less careful this time. He missed his footing on the roof and crashed through a glass skylight, gashing his leg. With difficulty he got back on to the roof and as far as the top of the wall but then he began to feel faint. Two young men were passing and Alex called to them for help. That was all he remembered until he woke up to find the white-haired man of his vision bending over him. He was a doctor and he was stitching the cut.

Alex's growing belief in witchcraft, reinforced by each experience of clairvoyance, did not conflict with his regular attendance at Sunday School. His gran had explained that there was only one God but that he was known by many names. It was easy, too, to accept that the Virgin Mary was the moon goddess in disguise.

Alex's childhood heroes took on new aspects when Gran re-told their stories. There was Robin Hood, previously just the leader of the merry men, but now revealed in his real role as a witch who used his powers to direct money where it was most needed, and to escape his pursuers. And Joan of Arc, who was really the Witch Queen of France and unashamedly declared it by her dress in an age when witches were the only females who would wear men's clothing. The terror Alex had felt when he first heard of her dying in the flames was allayed when he learnt that condemned witches were usually helped by their companions at liberty. If drugs like dwale or foxglove could not be smuggled into gaol, then witches in the crowd round the pyre would use their powers to hypnotize the victim and deaden her pain when the flames reached her.

Love potions, good-luck charms—Gran's remedies were all absorbed by the enchanted child. He hardly ever saw a blade of grass in his world of concrete, but he learnt how to recognize wild thyme, rosemary and pimpernel from the book in which his grandmother had pressed leaves, ferns and flowers during her youth in the foothills of Snowdon. As a

girl she had belonged to a coven of four witches who were ardent chapel-goers—in Bethesda anyone who missed a service without good reason was ostracized by the other residents. At night the coven used to climb part-way up the mountain to a small lake reputed to have belonged to witches since the Middle Ages. Stepping-stones led to the small island in the centre which was the circle where they performed their rituals, and in the inky black waters they studied the moon's reflections and conjured up the future.

When he was nine, Alex was allowed to take part in his first full-moon ceremony. Gran had no difficulty in persuading his mother to part with him for the night, for she was delighted with the progress he had made in Welsh and grateful to her mother for having taught him.

As the moon rose, Gran opened the kitchen curtains and let its light flood the kitchen. She had banked up the fire with small coal to deaden its glow and now she led Alex into the centre of the circle. The air was heavy with incense burning in four bowls placed at intervals round the perimeter. She handed him his own athame and told him she was going to consecrate it. The boy had to lie flat on his back, the dagger on his bare chest; then she lowered herself on to him, muttering incantations he had never heard before. He felt peculiar, his bare body pressed close to hers, but she was deadly serious and already he firmly believed in her magic. When they rose, she led him outside into the yard where she told him to raise his athame to the moon and repeat the words of the ritual. It was his first 'calling down the moon' ceremony.

Although magic, witchcraft and the ever-increasing affinity he formed with his grandmother filled most of his childhood, Alex was usually able to lead an entirely separate life at home. He was very close to his sister Joan, two years his junior, but though he often longed to tell her his secrets, there was scarcely ever the time or privacy required. At one stage he was getting up at five o'clock every other morning to take a pillowcase to the local bakery where a new bread-slicing machine was having teething troubles. The first half-dozen

loaves of the day were deformed and Alex could buy them for threepence.

Boyish rivalry sometimes stretched the promises he had made to his grandmother. When a classmate boasted of a Spanish rapier his father had bought, Alex could not resist mentioning his grandmother's swords.

'Go on, you're a liar!' jeered his classmate. Alex was too small and thin to fight, so he marched his friend to Gran's house, told him to keep quiet, and led him into the empty kitchen. He knew how to operate the double-lock on the chest. As he was turning the key, Gran came in. She had been in the front room and had seen them coming up the street. She fetched him a clout across his head that made his ears ring.

'You're never to bring boys in here again, do you hear?'

Alex nodded silently, and when his companion had gone, Gran made him promise never to open the chest again without her permission.

Alex did not forget, but not long afterwards his school was performing a play and one of the props needed was a ceremonial sword. Alex immediately told the master in charge, who was his favourite, that he had just the thing. 'It's gold and it has huge rubies in it, I'll bring it in,' he volunteered.

Gran was horrified and told him that he certainly could not borrow it. Even though it was only gilded and the 'rubies' were coloured glass, it was a consecrated piece of regalia and not to be handled by non-witches.

Chastened, Alex went to school the next day and explained the matter to the master. 'I'm a witch, you see, and non-witches aren't allowed to use such weapons.' The master threw back his head and roared with laughter and Alex could never really like him again.

Now that he had an athame of his own he began to take part in the rituals within the circle which Gran performed to cure the sickness of neighbours who had petitioned her. Then he embarked on the next step of his training; he started to make his own copy of *The Book of Shadows*, the witchcraft manual

containing basic chants, recipes and instructions for various magic rites. Almost unaltered over the years, the book had been copied by every witch in his or her own handwriting so that if arrested in the era of persecution, one could not implicate another.

Carefully Alex copied every word of his grandmother's tattered volume into an exercise book, and promised her that when she died he would destroy her copy and keep only his own.

This was a major development in Alex's training as a witch, and with it came new powers. Instead of gazing into a bowl of ink, he was now allowed to use his grandmother's crystal.

'Don't clutch it—you'll mist it over,' she scolded, the first time he tried. 'Sit in a relaxed position and half close your eyes. Now, tell me what you see.'

Alex gazed in shock and amazement. There were aeroplanes falling out of the sky and crashing into houses. The side wall of one house had been torn away, exposing a cross-section of tilting floors. Flames were licking at buildings; people with terror-stricken faces were running wildly through the streets, carrying their screaming children. Five years later, in 1940, he would gaze again at the identical scene.

He now had his own witch-name, Verbius, and he called his grandmother by hers, Medea. Sometimes he used it when his brother and sisters were there and he had to pretend it was a nickname. He revelled in Gran's favouritism; he loved his mother, even his father, but Gran was someone very special.

'What would have happened,' he once asked her, 'if I had not interrupted your ritual that day? Would you have let me go on as a non-witch?'

She did not know; for her, Alex's unscheduled appearance that day had been the work of fate. None of her own three daughters had ever discovered her secret; even her own mother had not known, although she herself had been a witch's daughter.

Gran was certainly proud of her apt pupil; he had mastered

the rituals, he knew how to draw the magic circle, how to call down the power to work for him, how to conjure up spirit children he could play with. Gran understood all this of old and smiled indulgently, but she impressed him with the need for utter integrity. She warned him that if he abused the power, used it for selfish ends, to the harm of others, it would destroy him.

For Alex at this point, it was all somewhat exasperating. He dreamed of riches, even of gaining a few extra inches to make him as big as other boys his age. And his rapidly developing gift of clairvoyance was not always welcome. Hours before his mother and father had a quarrel he would hear the words they were going to use against each other. Near to tears, he would bury his head in the pillow and wait impatiently—the sooner the quarrel began, the sooner it would be over.

His grandmother wasted no sympathy on him, and told him to think of the good he could do. Without letting her neighbours know she was a witch, she worked to cure their ailments, both physical and mental.

'If I can help others, why can't I help myself?' Alex once asked her. He was referred to his *Book of Shadows* and told to attend to the basic rules—ask, never command; be grateful for what you get even though it is not exactly what you want.

Now as it happened, Alex for once knew exactly what he wanted. He worked out a series of incantations, and dreamed of a pair of magnificent brown boots. Three days later, on his way to school, he saw a splendid second-hand bicycle on sale for fifteen shillings. However, he didn't have one shilling, let alone fifteen, and his mother, who regarded debt as only one step removed from theft, refused to try to borrow the money. The next day he was told of a newsagent looking for a delivery boy. Alex got his mother's permission to proposition him: he, the employer, should buy the bicycle and for the next thirty weeks keep sixpence out of Alex's one-and-sixpence-a-week wage to pay for it. Alex would save up his remaining pay for the brown boots. Sure enough, before three

weeks were out, he saw in a pawnbroker's shop the very boots he had dreamed of—priced at three shillings!

A by-product of his new job was that it absolved him from the punishment meted out by his father, who was fond of making an errant child stand upright at the table for two or three hours at a time. The offence might be as small as making a noise while Father was listening to a symphony concert on the radio. Now that Alex was a wage-earner, his mother demanded that he be spared such treatment.

When Alex was eleven he won a scholarship to William Hulmes Grammar School, but it never crossed his mind to use magic to make his parents accept the award. Already there was a fifth child in the family and much as Alex longed to be a doctor, taking up a place at grammar school was out of the question, even for a witch. His father was now working in a floor-tile business, but they had had to leave the house in Chorlton and were renting a large old house in Old Trafford, No. 23 Virgil Street. Times were hard. Alex himself was going through a bleak period—all his visions spoke of sorrow and loneliness, there was no one he could turn to. When he asked his grandmother to interpret them she refused. It was his future; no one else could read it for him.

3 The Haunted Hill

In 1939 David was born, the sixth and last of Alex's brothers and sisters, and soon afterwards war broke out. Alex, with most of the other children in Manchester, was evacuated to the country to escape air raids. It was a wrench leaving his parents, and his sisters and brothers, who were sent to separate foster homes, but most of all he hated leaving his grandmother.

'Remember your vows,' she told him sternly. 'Keep your mouth shut and your honour clean. And don't be afraid.' She tried to comfort the white-faced boy. 'You'll have a good time in the country; there's a lovely home waiting for you, and luxury like you've never seen before.'

The children were farmed out willy-nilly to families that had spare bedrooms, some in cottages, others in mansions. Alex was given board in the luxurious home of a cotton-mill owner in Great Harwood, in the heart of the Lancashire witch country, famous in the sixteenth century for witch-hunts and executions. Uncle Louie was a man in his middle forties, the father of a baby daughter, Gillian. His Queen Anne house stood on the foothills of Pendle Hill and it was a palace in the eyes of Alex. Tea was served on a silver service by maids, suits of armour stood in niches in the entrance hall and, best

of all, his bedroom overlooked the slopes of Pendle Hill. Uncle Louie warmed to the solemn little boy and took him on walks all over the hills, teaching him the wood-lore of the countryside.

Auntie Alice was not so amiable; daughter of a miner, she had worked hard to come up in the world and she found nothing engaging about this boy from the city who reminded her of her own beginnings. She looked after his physical needs but the antipathy was mutual and Alex steered clear of her.

Before long he was enrolled in the Boy Scout troop led by his foster uncle. In the fields and woods Alex saw for the first time living examples of the plants in his grandmother's book. They were happy days, for Uncle Louie was delighted with his small disciple.

One autumn day Alex was taken on a picnic to the top of Pendle Hill, a local beauty spot. Although it was sunny, he shivered as he stood on the bare hillside. Emanations of previous ages chilled him to the bone; the breeze moaned in his heart and he longed to be alone that he might try to understand its meaning. Uncle Louie knew none of this.

'Look at the view, lad.' He pointed out the misty expanse of Lancashire round them. 'Folks say that witches used to come up here and worship heathen gods, but some folks'll say anything.'

One by one the long-dead witches flickered across Alex's consciousness, indistinct, but with the symbols of their witchhood clearly defined: the horns—sign of the fertility cult—the broomsticks, the raised athames. He knew he would never be satisfied until he had conjured them up in a circle to hear what they had to tell him.

Unable to practise his witchcraft properly, for Gran had explained time and time again that only a third-grade witch could work in a circle, and then with at least one companion, Alex had to observe the full-moon rites at his bedroom window. His athame had been left at his grandmother's, but he went through the motions, wishing himself back in

Manchester in spite of the affection he felt for Uncle Louie.

It came as a shock when the latter told him one morning that he was to be confirmed, but when he protested his objections were overruled.

'I've written to your parents,' Uncle Louie said. 'Your mother told me you were baptized into the Church of England. She'll be glad if you're confirmed.'

The ceremony took place in St Hubert's Church at Great Harwood and Alex prayed throughout it, apologizing to Jesus Christ and assuring Him that no blasphemy was intended. He did not need to placate his witch god, feeling sure that he would understand.

Afterwards he put the whole episode behind him and roamed the countryside testing his witch knowledge. He found the wild herbs used for potions in the very places described in witch-records; 'beside fast running water', 'beneath the mossy side of stones', 'where two streams meet'. He would have much to tell his grandmother.

The months he spent with his Uncle Louie were among the happiest of his childhood, free as they were from the problems of poverty, but he badly wanted to visit his grandmother. The matter resolved itself in June 1940 when his parents sent word for him to come home. He was just fourteen and his schooldays were over; it was time to go to work.

Back home in Manchester, this time in Cornbrook Street, Old Trafford, where his mother had moved so that she could take in boarders, Alex found a job with a carpenter that left him free to spend every evening with his grandmother. She made him study harder than ever. 'I've so much to teach you. We mustn't waste time,' she told him.

Alex was puzzled; time was the one thing he had plenty of. 'What's the hurry? I'm not going away again.'

She looked at him and shook her head; time enough later for him to know the reasons. Now she must press on with his training.

When they were not working together within the magic

circle, she would tell him all the tales that had been passed from witch to witch through the ages. The true religion, she explained, was the love of life and the love of the giver of life. Man must love woman, woman man, and both must love the god that made them. The main tenet of the cult was the belief in fertility. This was something with which Alex, as one of a large family, was all too familiar, and he regarded it as a mixed blessing. Now he heard that in olden times people without children were as nothing—it was their offspring that gave them a stake in the future—and he learnt of the first fertility rites held by white witches on May eve and November eve when, after honouring their god, they feasted, drank and made love. (The last was never performed communally, for that was considered obscene and a perversion of the witch law, but nevertheless white witches were reviled for their 'orgies' just as hysterically as black witches.)

There was so much for Alex to learn, and all of it by heart, that he sometimes protested; he was still growing and, with the continuous air raids, was getting very little sleep at night. In addition his father was drinking heavily and the domestic tension was beginning to get Alex down. Once he asked if he could have a break from his apprenticeship. 'I *am* a witch already, so why do I need to know so much more?'

His grandmother explained that he was still only a first-grade witch and totally unprepared to handle the power he would develop in the second or third grade. Furthermore, he would not be able to initiate another witch until he himself had reached the higher grade.

Alex seized the opportunity to question his grandmother on the one subject she always avoided; living witches. Once again she refused to be drawn. 'What you don't know, can't hurt,' was her reply and Alex had to hide his frustration until another day.

At about this time other images began appearing in the crystal. An especially terrifying one was of a man's arm being dragged through a giant wringing machine. Another portrayed the death of someone Alex loved.

'What do they mean?' he asked, but his grandmother could not tell him.

'You must interpret your own visions,' she explained, 'I can only teach you to raise them. But they never lie, even though you may not always interpret the time factor correctly.'

'But who is going to die?' he persisted. 'And why can't we make a circle and work to keep them alive?'

At this the old lady put away her mending and looked at him sternly. 'We have the powers of vision and of bringing spirits to help us, but never imagine that we have the power of God. Witchcraft is based on natural laws so that everyone must die when their time comes. With that we cannot interfere.'

That December another of Alex's early visions was fulfilled. The air raid came soon after dark and before long it was obvious that this was no ordinary attack. Wave after wave of bombers droned over the city, dropping both incendiary and high-explosive bombs. For hour after hour there was no respite. Huddled in the cellar with his parents, and with his brothers and sisters who had come home for Christmas, Alex worried about his grandmother. Could she be the loved one who would die, and would this be the night of her death? Bombs were landing all around and bits of plaster kept showering down on them as the foundations of the house shook.

About midnight he asked to go upstairs to get something to eat. He ran to the top of the house to look out, and there he saw the scene that had haunted his childhood, that had appeared in his grandmother's crystal the very first time he used it. Illuminated by the glare of a thousand fires, the jagged edge of a bombed house cut across the skyline, and in front of it a small group of people was being shepherded to safety by an air-raid warden. Children were crying; one had a makeshift bandage round her head. Then from above came the whistling of a stick of falling bombs: the terrified group cringed in unison, and was dispersed amongst the rubble.

Alex returned to the cellar, shaken by the truth of his prophecy but relieved that he had been witness, not victim.

Looking into the future began to lose its charm, for the vision had been more frightening than reality. Nevertheless he persisted in trying to see whose death was foretold. The three people he loved most were his grandmother, his mother and his sister Joan; if only he could have assured himself it was none of them he would have rested easy.

His grandmother survived the Blitz, but the carpenter for whom he worked had his premises destroyed and Alex had to find another job. He was engaged by a firm of manufacturing chemists—and now another vision came true. After working in the laboratories for a while, he was transferred to the plant making adhesive plaster. There, dominating the workshop, was the gigantic calender that had appeared like a wringing machine in the crystal. Alex dreaded approaching it, convinced that it was his own arm he had seen mangled, but it was his job to stand behind it guiding the material. Day after frightening day he took up his position until, at last, he heard the expected screams: he ran round to the front of the machine in time to see his companion's arm being fed between the rollers.

By this time Alex had begun to be interested in girls; his grandmother, noticing this development, decided he was ready for the second- and third-grade initiations. She had already taught him at length about sex, self-control and the ways witches have of harnessing impulses so that the sex force can be used positively towards creating power. 'Implosion' was the term she used, the antithesis of masturbation.

On the night of the initiation ceremony she laid out a new robe she had made for Alex. They both bathed themselves before entering the circle. By the light of two candles on the altar—a draught-board table on which the regalia was arranged—she lay down on the floor and drew the boy to her until their bare bodies touched. Then they were united. There were no gestures of affection or passion; it was strictly a ritual and Alex did not feel the slightest repugnance at losing his virginity to a woman of seventy-four. Afterwards she opened a bottle of wine and, in his new robes, Alex poured a libation to the moon goddess and drank to his future as a witch.

Before many months had passed Mary Bibby died. Her daughter went to dispose of her possessions and was mildly surprised at the odd collection of 'antiques' she found in the old chest. Alex begged to have them as mementoes and his mother agreed. Aware of the boy's desolation at his grandmother's death, she hoped the sword, the crystal, the brass bowls and the censer would comfort him, but refused to let him keep the iron cauldron—or coal scuttle as she called it. There was nothing else to suggest that Gran had been a witch. Alex had burnt her *Book of Shadows* immediately after her death and had chopped up her broomstick which had been carved with phallic symbols.

So much of his life had been spent studying witchcraft with his grandmother that Alex was now at a loose end. When he tried to work magic to bring her back, if only for a moment, he met with total failure. There were few occasions for him to be alone, for he shared a bedroom with his three brothers and there was usually one of them trailing after him. Even his clairvoyance deserted him, and he began to think that it had never really existed but had been projected on him by his grandmother. Had it all been made up, all she had told him about witchcraft and supernatural powers? He read and re-read his *Book of Shadows* and decided that no uneducated woman could have written such prose nor expressed such philosophy.

As he recovered from his initial grief he began to accept that he was helpless until such times as he could find another witch to work with if there were any still alive. Alone he dared not conjure up spirits or call down the power from the moon, knowing that witch law proscribes individual work. Little use to reason that his gran had been doing just that when he had first discovered her as a witch. Alex was very young still, and very unsure of himself. All he could do was watch and wait until someone gave the sign that he would surely recognize.

4 Call Down the Spirits

When Alex was seventeen he met a girl who was a keen spiritualist. Learning of his interest in the occult, she invited him to a meeting. He was curious to see if it had anything in common with witchcraft, and went along with her. During the evening a medium in a trance singled him out. 'I see horns on your head,' she murmured. There was a ripple of laughter; horns could mean he was a cuckold. But Alex knew them as the symbol of witchcraft and was impressed by such perception. He went along to every meeting at the spiritualist church and before long he was being trained as a medium. At heart he felt he was cheating, for while they talked of 'going into a trance', he was working witchcraft. But what did it matter, he asked himself? The end product was the same, a glimpse into the future, and he was not disobeying the witch law by working alone.

Without telling his companions he was using powers taught him by his grandmother, he began healing. There was a woman who suffered from fibrositis in her back; a man whose face was disfigured with a twitch; in all about a dozen cases. It was nothing to Alex; with his gran he had practised the same cures in aid of her neighbours almost

ten years ago. But to his spiritualist friends this was magic indeed. Word spread and the little church was inundated with appeals for cures. Glad to be able to use his gifts, Alex spent nearly every night laying his hands on troubled bodies. There was nothing in it for him save the glow of satisfaction, the happiness in being needed, but those who were cured showed their gratitude to the church. Money poured in; the building was redecorated and refurnished; the congregation increased to an unprecedented size.

It was interesting work and the praise he reaped was gratifying, yet spiritualism to Alex was but a pale imitation of witchcraft. Disturbing the dead was too close to necromancy, to which witches object, and he disliked keeping secret the source of his powers. Witchcraft was infinitely more satisfying because each member actively participated; there was no passive audience as in spiritualism.

Alex's new-found popularity turned his head, however, and he began to boast that he could have any girl he wanted. One of his colleagues in the laboratory was a quiet girl, tall—at five-foot-seven, the same height as Alex—and more refined than the others. Doreen and he became lovers. He was twenty-one, she nineteen, when they married and moved into a small two-up-and-two-down house in Vale Street, Hulme.

Almost from the start he felt trapped. What had happened to the rosy dreams he had had? Here he was in a 6s. 10d.-a-week house with no hot water and, most frightening of all, there was a baby on the way. He redoubled his efforts to find another witch with whom he could work magic—if only to influence his opportunities for promotion. Doreen had no idea that she had married a witch, and as he lay beside her at night, frustrated and resentful, tantalizing glimpses of the future flickered before his eyes. He could see parties, himself in evening dress (although he had never worn it), fifty or a hundred guests greeting him as their host. There was a ball-room—his own . . . and once again the death of someone he loved. In swift succession the pictures flashed by.

Lying awake long into the night, he tried to reason how he, a low-paid, poorly educated analytical chemist living in a near-slum, could ever come to afford such lavish parties, and he shied away at the thought of another death. His father was now a permanent invalid, but the death in his vision seemed to be that of a woman.

Since his activities in the spiritualist church kept him busy and he was happy enough at work, where he compared modern formulae for patent medicines with age-old recipes of witchcraft—sometimes to the former's disadvantage—Alex was unaware at first that his marriage was beginning to break up. Doreen leaned heavily on her mother, who disliked Alex, and neither little Paul nor, later, baby Janice did anything to cement the marriage. Paul was three when his sister was born in the room upstairs, and the first thing Alex noticed when he went up to see the newly born baby was her right foot; it was twisted back to front. The midwife sent for the doctor and he brought a specialist. The baby was taken to hospital for an immediate examination, and returned two or three hours later. Nothing could be done until the child was thirteen or fourteen.

Alex rebelled; he had to help his baby even if it meant breaking the witch law by working alone. After Janice had been fed, he carried her downstairs and sat her on his lap before the fire. He prayed to his god for advice and help. 'Warm some olive oil and rub it into the joint', was the message that sprang to his mind. Accordingly he fetched some oil and poured it into a saucer. He dipped his fingers into it and began to touch the baby's crooked foot. As he did so, he felt impelled to twist the joint and, although he was alarmed, he followed his instincts. The child did not waken as the foot responded to the manipulation, and he sponged off the oil before returning her to her cradle. He did not tell his wife how the child had been cured but let her and the doctor believe it had been spontaneous.

The friction between husband and wife increased, however, and one day when Alex returned from work he found that she had taken the children and most of the furniture and had

left him for good. Until now he had neither smoked nor drunk and he had always handed over his pay packet unopened; he had considered himself a model husband, not realizing that his own immaturity had been one of the causes of the separation. He was twenty-six and he believed he had finished with women.

Soon afterwards fire destroyed his place of employment for the second time in his life and, out of work, he became utterly despondent. His sister Joan spent all her free time with him, cooking his meals and trying to cure his depression. One evening she helped him to paint the kitchen, urging that a change of colour would help to cheer him up. Together they worked through the night, not finishing until the early hours of the morning.

'Do you know what day it is?' Joan asked, when at last they put away their brushes. 'It's Shrove Tuesday. Let's have the first pancakes in the world.'

Companionably they sat by the fire, eating pancakes. Suddenly Alex could keep his secret no longer. 'Do you know that I'm a witch?'

'Don't be daft,' Joan replied.

'But I am,' he insisted, and went on to tell her of his childhood initiation and the magic he had worked with Gran. She laughed at him, thinking he was making it up as he went along.

'If you can work magic and conjure up spirits as you claim, prove it. Go on,' she dared. 'Bring one of your demons here, now.'

Obediently he unsheathed his black-hilted knife, which was no longer kept hidden as it had been when his wife was at home.

Discomfited by his earnest manner, Joan had second thoughts. 'The joke's over, Alex, I didn't mean to tease you.'

But Alex ignored her. He commanded a demon to visit them, someone they both knew. Hardly had the incantation ended when there was a loud knocking on the front door. Horrified, Joan begged him not to answer it. Seconds later the knocking

was repeated, this time on the back door that led directly off the kitchen where they were sitting.

She crept behind him as he opened the door. The visitor was an actor, a friend of their family.

'I wonder if you'd help me out,' he said. 'My mates have let me down and I've nowhere to stay for the night. Could you put me up?'

Alex was about to let him in but his sister was almost in tears.

'You can't stay here,' she said. 'You've no business knocking on people's doors at three o'clock in the morning.'

Offended, the friend went away leaving Alex to comfort his sister.

'I don't know if his visit was a coincidence,' she said hysterically, 'but I don't like it. You mustn't play about with spells ever again. You must stop all that, do you hear?'

'Stop it?' exclaimed Alex. 'I'm only just beginning.'

Bitterly he gave a long recital of the self-denial he had practised over the years. And what good had it done him? No job, no wife, no money.

'I've finished with stupidity now. I'm going to think of myself for a change. From now on I'm going to use the powers I can muster to work for me. I'm going to have all the things I've never had. Wealth, luxury, leisure . . .'

'But you just said you mustn't ask for these things,' interrupted Joan.

'I'm not going to ask for them. I'm going to demand them. All right, so the powers may turn against me in the end. Well let them. I'll enjoy the present and to hell with the future—I'll make damned sure of the present first.'

All the while he was talking he was walking about the room collecting incense burners, swords, a white-hilted knife to match his athame, and a dish of water which he placed on the black antique dresser that his grandmother had left him. It had served her and her grandmother before her as a witches' high altar and now it served Alex.

By the light of candles he described a magic circle with his

sword, excluding Joan. When she made as if to speak he told her to keep quiet or get out. The air became heavy with incense as he worked the spells and recited the words that would lead him from white witchcraft to black.

'By all the powers I command the demons to bring me wealth, riches, power. . . '

Joan sobbed quietly, not understanding all that was going on but realizing that her beloved brother was bargaining for his soul with the devil and that, in the end, someone would have to pay.

5 Bewitched

For two days life went on as before. Alex was negotiating the sale of some formulae used by his firm to a freelance traveller who was planning to set up on his own. He was past caring about such things as patents and copyright; he wanted money, and perhaps this was the way to get it.

Then, one evening, with scarcely a penny in his pocket, he walked into Manchester and strolled through Piccadilly Gardens, envious of the people hurrying about their business, and particularly those entering the luxury hotels nearby. As he did so he became aware of a middle-aged man and woman following him, and he doubled back on his tracks to see what they would do. As he passed them, they gave him a half-smile and he stopped to see if they were acquaintances.

'I hope you don't think we are being rude, staring at you so,' the woman apologized, 'but you are the image of our son . . . We lost him some years ago. . . . We were marvelling that any two men could be so alike.'

Touched by her confidence, Alex listened sympathetically as she and her husband spoke of their bereavement. Kenneth, their only child, had died of meningitis three years before at the age of twenty.

'Won't you come and join us for a drink?' her husband

asked. Alex did not drink, but he agreed to have dinner with them at the nearby Grand Hotel, and after the meal promised to dine at their home the next night.

The couple lived in Fallowfield in a large old house with enormous bay windows. Within a week Alex was a regular visitor; he was treated like a son and was obviously a great comfort to the couple. After many refusals, for their hospitality was frequently overwhelming, Alex agreed to come and live with them, but first he insisted on telling them about himself. They were incredulous, quite unable to believe that witchcraft was anything but dead. Alex told them as much as he could of his religion, and although they remained firmly Christian, they still wanted Alex to move in with them.

'You need someone to look after you,' they told him. 'If you get tired of us, you have only to say the word.'

Ron was a stockbroker, a diffident man, shy of emotion and so sensitive that often he had to leave the room when his son's name was mentioned. His wife Maud poured out her frustrated affection on Alex and frequently called him 'Kenneth' when her husband wasn't present. Pampered and cosseted, Alex settled down to a life of idleness. Each evening, after his friends had gone to bed, he walked the streets until dawn reciting his incantations which, for the first time in his life, seemed to have lost their magic and, in fact, their whole meaning. True, he had acquired a great degree of comfort without having worked for it, but it had not brought him the happiness he had expected.

One night he found himself in a neighbouring road where a large house, Riversdale, sheltered under a magnificent chestnut tree. Alex stopped and stared. It was the house of his visions; clearly he recognized the noble frontage and the shape of the porch, but in the crystal it had been freshly painted. Now it had a run-down air, and swinging crookedly from a post was a 'For Sale' sign. Picking his way through the overgrown garden, he felt his heart beat faster as he recognized the path to the ballroom which had dominated his dreams of years ago. This was the house that was destined to be his.

In a fever of excitement he hurried back and paced the floor until Ron and Maud woke up. He told them of his discovery and urged them to go to Demesne Road the next day to see it.

'It's derelict!' they exclaimed when they arrived there, but even by day it had for Alex an air of mystery and magic. The old caretaker who lived in it showed them round the twenty-six rooms, from the semi-basement, which had been turned into a billiard room forty-foot long and which in Alex's vision had been the ballroom, to the servants' quarters in the attic where fungi festooned the walls.

'It was built for Lord Egerton of Tatton in 1872, and it needs a lot of repairs,' said the old man.

To Alex's delight, Ron agreed to buy it, and as soon as the legal formalities were completed he told Alex that he could live in the house for the rest of his life and would receive a regular allowance.

'Go and enjoy yourself choosing the furniture—and send the bills to me,' he said.

Wistfully Maud asked if Alex wouldn't like to live with them at Fallowfield and use Riversdale as a weekend home for his friends, but her husband shook his head. 'The boy wants to be on his own, my dear.'

Alex had the grace to feel a pang of regret at the way in which he was using them. They believed they were choosing to treat him as a substitute son, while he believed he was manipulating their wills through black witchcraft. But he pushed his misgivings behind him; they were getting their money's worth, he told himself, they enjoyed his pleasure. What else could they spend their money on? They were approaching fifty, and old for their years.

Far from being penniless, Alex now had a bottomless purse; he had only to admire something for his benefactor to hand him a cheque—or cash—to buy it. Each day became a hectic round of shopping, visiting auctions and collecting period furniture with which to equip his home, and there were any number of specialists to advise him on taste and

design. Several thousands of pounds went on restoring Riversdale's solid mahogany staircase, decorating its sixteen bedrooms and painting its exterior.

Seventeen hand-tailored suits hung in Alex's wardrobe, and two daily women were needed to clean the collection of Georgian silver and polish the antique furniture. Life became one round of gaiety. Each morning he would go into the city where he had joined almost every club. Inevitably, he had taken up drinking, and he would return home at night having drunk most of a bottle of brandy.

A few months of this life, and it began to pall, however. He wanted to have more time in the house on which he had spent so much of his benefactor's money. Ron was happy about Alex's new circumstances if only because of the change it had wrought in Maud. In the years since her bereavement she had been retreating from contact with people and was well on the way to developing agoraphobia. Doctors had assured him that there was nothing organically wrong, but Ron was terrified of losing her as well as his son. Since Alex had come into their lives, however, she had been a different woman. Her life revolved round him even though they saw him only once or twice a week. It was like a miracle to Ron to hear laughter in the house again and to be able to face each day eagerly. No matter how much money he spent on Alex it was worth every penny. A ballroom? Certainly he should have one, and the best architect in the district was called in to convert the billiard room.

When the grand opening party was held, the room was exactly as it had appeared in Alex's visions. The pillars supporting the ceiling were each draped with a different-coloured length of silk; a bar was built across one end of the room; and right in the middle of the parquet floor had been painted a huge magic circle adorned with the cabalistic symbols handed down from the ancient Hebrews. The wild life had come true; the demons had done their work.

Money begets money; now that Alex had all that he wanted, and more, he was in great demand as a model for

leading photographic agencies. Under the name of Paul Dallas, he sported the latest fashions and posed as the escort of beautiful women. He became the darling of the local 'jet set'. When his companions heard that he dabbled in magic—he still kept his secret—they pressed him to make them amulets and good-luck charms.

Alex revelled in his power and popularity. He mixed mostly with men he had met in Manchester clubs—doctors, actors, businessmen and entrepreneurs, their one common asset being money. His female acquaintances were more diverse—daughters of indulgent daddies, show girls, factory girls, typists and the occasional call-girl. With so many followers he had no difficulty filling his ballroom whenever he gave a party. Outside caterers and staff were engaged to provide and serve food and drink, for Alex knew from experience that he could have little privacy with servants in residence. At midnight when the staff had departed he would pass the word round to get rid of the 'outsiders'—those who could not be trusted to be let into the secrets. In the end perhaps ten or twelve couples would remain.

Alex then showed the guests to their bedrooms and they would all return to the ballroom wearing exotic dressing-gowns. The conventional lighting would give way to coloured lighting (of the type now known as psychedelic). Rainbows flickered across the ceiling, and were reflected in the full-length mirrors that lined the walls. While Alex plied the girls with drinks, his closest friends would drive into the city to collect two or three down-and-outs, offering them a meal and plenty to drink. They seldom refused.

As the party progressed, the dressing-gowns would be discarded, and any other clothes, until all would be naked. To this wild scene would be introduced the bewildered, tattered strangers. Furnished with liquor and food such as they had not seen in years, they swallowed their scruples along with the provisions, and by the time the next act had begun they would be too far gone to care.

One by one they were led upstairs to the bathrooms where,

watched by an audience of half-drunk nudes, they were told to get undressed and have a bath. The filthier the stranger, the more disgusting his clothes and body, the more exciting the occasion. The well-fed guests gasped as the pitiful human carcasses were exposed to their eyes. By now the down-and-outs were usually sobering up and beginning to realize how they had been used. They seldom protested, however, aware, perhaps for the first time, of their own degradation. Silently they would dress and make their escape as fast as possible.

To revive flagging spirits, Alex would then call his friends back to the ballroom where, with the lights now dimmed, he would set up an altar to worship the devil. Letting the others suggest the ceremony, he would drape a tapestry over the long table on which the food had been laid, and set it with bowls of flowers. Then the devil dance would start, increasing in abandon until a girl climbed on the altar and lay down to be worshipped by the others. Invariably her partner would join her and, urged on by the erotic gathering, they would consummate their passion to applause.

Alex joined in the applause as much as the others, and tried to still the shame he felt in his misuse of witchcraft. When the guests had gone to bed he would bring out his athame, describe a witch's circle and chant the invocations that might bring him peace. He prayed to the great god to send him someone to love, someone who would love him in return, but not a candle flame would flicker; no breath from the outer world would disturb the incense.

What would happen if Ron heard of the true nature of these parties? There was a chance he might, though a remote one. He never came to Riversdale unless invited, not wanting Alex to feel under any obligation to him, and none of Alex's friends mixed in the old-fashioned business milieu that Ron favoured. A regular allowance was paid into Alex's bank account on the first of each month; if he overdraw it—which he did frequently in those first months—he had only to telephone Maud or Ron to receive a cheque by return. All the household accounts were sent direct to Ron's office.

Alex's sudden affluence did not go entirely unnoticed. His story was, quite simply, that he had been left a fortune. In fact, quite apart from Ron's disinterested generosity, he was showered with gifts from other men who were endowed with more money and sensuality than common sense. Deviates and perverses competed for his favours. One gave him a house designed after an Italian villa; several gave him valuable jewellery.

But now, for the first time in his life, Alex was subject to black moods of depression and he sometimes craved the solace of his religion. He would take out the tarot cards inscribed with Hebrew letters and symbols and, spreading them out on the floor in front of him, would try to see into the future. Time and time again the cards representing pain and death fell before him, but gave him no clue to the time, the place or the person. In desperation he would put them away and go out to seek new diversions.

Alex was now a hardened drinker and also kept a string of mistresses—at one time as many as eight were living under his roof. His promiscuity did not stop at women, however. His bizarre, extravagant clothes and good looks attracted the attention of homosexuals, and he was not loth to experiment. One evening in a Manchester pub he got talking with a man in his thirties who had a public-school accent and an eye for young men. He was a viscount and through him Alex was introduced to an entirely different set. At the first stately home party to which he was invited he felt like an innocent schoolboy. Ostensibly it was a week-end hunt party; between forty and fifty guests were staying at the viscount's country seat in Derbyshire, and a further hundred and fifty came to a dance on Saturday evening. As at Alex's parties, the fun did not begin until most of the guests had left. The thirty or so who remained taught Alex a number of perversions with which he was unfamiliar. One baronet put on a tight rubber suit similar to those worn by frogmen, but with holes cut in various strategic places so that the flesh bulged out, grossly misshapen. Two women fought over the possession of a third,

and a group of men rhythmically beat each other's bare bodies with slender canes. If sex was normal it was too dull for these people; they vied with each other in finding new kicks. In these circles no one was ever shocked. This contrast between private and public lives appealed to Alex's sense of humour.

Subsequent parties were held at various houses in Somerset, Wiltshire and Cheshire, and not all the fun was sexual. Practical jokes abounded. There was a judge who went to bed drunk and woke up to find all the hair on one side of his body had been shaved off in the night. A London financier awoke to find his suit carefully unpicked and lying in neat pieces—and his other clothes had been spirited away. It was all good fun, and no one dared complain, for the entrée to this set was compliance with its excesses.

A magistrate held one week-end party at his house outside Manchester while his wife was away. When the other guests had gone to their rooms, the host invited Alex to his inner sanctum: a small bedroom, the walls and ceiling of which were lined with mirrors set at various angles. As they both lay naked on the narrow bed, thousands of images of every part of their bodies were reflected on all sides.

One of the regular guests at these parties was an enormously rich Italian count who was married, with three children, and had tea estates in Ceylon, vineyards in Italy—and an insatiable hunger for young men like Alex. He showered gifts on him—watches, jewelled cuff-links, expensive cameras—and begged him to form a permanent relationship. Amused, Alex told him he was a witch and a magician, and not to be owned by anyone. This served to increase the count's ardour. Why couldn't Alex come to Italy, set up a black chapel and initiate his own coven? To prove his sincerity, the count, on his return to Italy, sent Alex by special messenger an inlaid box full of family jewels. Alex was fascinated, for he knew the box formed part of the count's family crest.

Afraid of the quicksands into which he seemed to be sinking, Alex repacked it and sent it back to Italy by courier. He was still worshipping in the magicians' circle, demanding

a continuance of his wealth, but he would not bring in other people even though it would increase his own power. Playfully praying to the devil to stimulate sexual appetite was one thing, but raising evil forces in all sincerity was quite another.

6 The Devil to Pay

Over-indulgence did nothing to dim Alex's powers of clairvoyance and he had no compunction in sharing his visions. 'You'll be in prison this time next year,' he once told a wealthy Suffolk landowner who was highly amused. In less than a year the man had begun a six-year sentence for fraudulent conversion. Even when Alex saw the symbol of death he spoke out, and his hosts and guests alike begged him to tell them more.

During this time his native sympathy had deserted him, however; he was wealthy and independent—to hell with the weak, especially if they were women. Some of the girls he took as mistresses were genuinely fond of him, but he treated them all as gold-diggers or prostitutes.

To voyeurs of his acquaintance who enjoyed their sex at second-hand, Alex used to explain how he introduced girls to Benedictine. 'It seems such an innocuous drink—a bit like cough medicine—and the younger the girl, the less suspicious she is about its potency. After a couple of glasses it's a short step to the bedroom. Once on the bed you can expect a brief tussle with the dress and then it's all plain sailing. Funny thing, there's only the initial difficulty; once the dress is off, the

defences are down. They are usually virgins—and they usually come back for more, night after night, like bitches on heat.'

Ruth was different; she looked like a slightly delinquent schoolgirl, but turned out to be a nineteen-year-old woman separated from her husband. She was brought to one of Alex's parties by a mutual friend and she was a welcome change from the virgins. Temporarily out of work, she was glad to move in at Riversdale, warming Alex's bed in return for her board. So long as she was sober she was a delightful companion—egocentric, but witty and an expert mimic. Once she had had a couple of drinks, however, her talents would run wild; her mimicry became caustic and she delighted in repeating whispered confidences to the very people whom they would hurt the most. It might not have mattered had everyone been in the same happy state, but Ruth was always drunk hours before anyone else. Alex's parties rapidly lost their popularity; many of his friends held responsible positions in the city, and any indiscretion on Ruth's part would have disastrous consequences.

When Alex told her to pack up and go she did not try to plead for another chance. In fact, she left immediately, despite his offer of a few days' grace in which to find lodgings.

'I managed on my own before I met you,' she told him. 'I'll manage quite well on my own again.'

A few weeks later Alex saw her with a young man in a local pub and she cut him dead. After a month or so he encountered her again in the same pub but this time she was alone. He went over to her and asked her how she was, and she told him she had a little flat and a new job. Her independence hurt Alex; what right had she to be so happy when she was still wearing the clothes he had bought her?

'What time will you be at home?' he asked, his intentions obvious. Ruth gave him her address and he arranged to visit her that night.

Her flat consisted of two attic rooms in a Victorian house a

mile or two from Riversdale, and here their affair blossomed again. He refused to take her back to Riversdale, for love in an attic, even one as spartan as this, provided him with more excitement. But the brief passion did not last; before long they had a violent quarrel in a city pub. They had been drinking all evening, and Alex had just bought a bottle of wine to take back to her flat, when she began jeering at his friends.

'They're using you,' she laughed. 'They wouldn't have anything to do with you if you had no money—they just pretend they like you and find you fascinating. You should be grateful I'm letting you come back to my place so that you don't have to spend the evening alone. You'd better take good care of me, because if I find somebody else you'll have no one.'

Alex told her once again that he had no intention of installing her in Riversdale, now or ever. 'If you could keep your mouth shut and be content with looking decorative, you'd be more of an asset,' he added.

Swearing at him, she told him to leave and never come back. Alex took her at her word. Unmoved by her tears and rage, he set the unopened bottle of wine before her and told her he was finished with her. Cuttingly he added that he could buy any number of girls for what he had spent on her, and be better satisfied.

When he arrived back home the telephone was ringing but he did not answer in case it was Ruth. Twice, three times more it rang during the evening. Early next morning he was awakened by the police and invited to make a statement. Ruth's landlady had found her slumped in a chair in her tiny kitchenette, the half-empty bottle of wine beside her, the gas stove full on. She was dead.

Alex told of the quarrel and of how he had not answered the telephone. The coroner suggested that she had heard other residents entering the house down below and had assumed Alex was one of them, especially since she had probably tried ringing him and there had been no reply. By staging a

dramatic suicide scene she might have wanted to frighten Alex into resuming their affair. But the plan had misfired and the suicide had become a reality.

Alex walked out of the inquest unable to meet the contemptuous stares of all who had heard the evidence. But for him, Ruth would not have given up her job. But for him she would not have been in a drunken stupor. But for him, she would be alive. Even his armour of selfishness could not shield him from the blame he knew he deserved.

From time to time Alex visited his sister Joan but their old sense of comradeship had gone. She had married Eric, an ex-major in the Green Howards, who was now working for Manchester Corporation. Between them they were struggling to set up house. Alex offered to help; a few thousand pounds would have made all the difference to his sister's comfort and it was nothing to him, but she would not hear of it. She urged him to give up his loose living.

'I don't believe in all that witchcraft nonsense but I do believe you're in league with the devil. Why, just look at you! You're only twenty-eight but you look like a dissipated forty. Go back to work, Alex. I'll help you.'

'You help me?' He sneered, comparing her off-the-peg skirt and sweater with his eighty-guinea suit.

His mother he visited, too, only infrequently, for there was no welcome awaiting him there. She was unaware of how he had achieved his prosperity but she knew it was not by honest means, and Alex did nothing to reassure her. He despised his family's miserable house and what seemed to him their totally unwarranted self-satisfaction. His younger brothers had been apprenticed to the floor-tiling firm that had employed his father and were bringing home steady but low wages. Alex enjoyed showing off his flashy suits and diamond rings and it irked him that none of his relatives would accept the money and gifts he offered. His mother made no secret of her disgust for his way of life and told him repeatedly she would rather he stayed away. When Alex scorned her for accepting his

father's shortcomings while denying him his, his mother would reply with quiet dignity that alcoholism was an illness, lechery a vice.

When the rejection by his family became too much to bear, Alex would visit the Egyptian room of the city museum in Manchester and sit next to the little mummified priestess that his grandmother had taken him to see as a child. There, beside the shrivelled figure, he could feel the same faint pity that had stirred him so long ago and he was able to forget his aimless selfishness for a few hours.

One of the women who lived at Riversdale at this time was fascinated by the witch knives and swords that he had collected, and although she believed in neither witchcraft nor the occult, she agreed to become a part-initiate so that she could sit in the circle with him to help draw down power. Night after night she went through the actions, repeating the runic chants required of her without result, until one evening she heard the sound of an explosion.

'It sounded like a gunshot,' she exclaimed. 'There's no one in the house besides us, is there?'

Alex assured her that what she had heard had not yet happened, but was her first sign of the future. She did not like it. Hastily she stepped out of the circle, refusing to have anything more to do with witchcraft, and trying to convince herself that the sound had been that of a car back-firing outside.

Three days later they were having lunch when the telephone rang. Alex's sister had been shot. He raced to the hospital in Blackpool fifty miles away. He was in time to see Joan wheeled from the operating theatre where she had had over a hundred stitches. She and her husband had been visiting old army friends who had been practising revolver shooting. A .45 had gone off accidentally and Joan had been in direct line of fire.

For two days Alex stayed at the hospital, praying for the powers to spare his sister, and when she was taken off the danger list he felt sure that it was due to his intervention. He

returned to Manchester certain that his troubles were over. This, he told himself, was the disaster that had been foreshadowed in the tarot cards. Yet when he cast them again a few days later, death still stared up at him.

When Joan came out of hospital Alex persuaded her to come to Riversdale; her house was in the process of being demolished and she had planned to move into temporary accommodation. Now he had a wing of the house hastily converted into a self-contained flat for her and Eric. 'You can enjoy a life of luxury too,' he told them.

But Joan hated every minute of the six months she spent there. Though Alex held no large parties during her stay and kept his girls out of her way, she had a good idea of the kind of life he was leading.

'You've sold your soul to the devil, all right,' she told him when he visited her for tea one day. 'I can feel the evil round you.'

Alex laughed and told her she probably had indigestion.

'Perhaps you're right,' she sighed. 'I haven't felt really well since I came out of hospital. Somehow I never seem to be free of pain.'

Now he looked at her closely and for the first time noticed her pallor, but she shrugged off his solicitude and advised him to look to his own affairs, not bother about her.

'Are you sure it isn't cancer?' The words came out before Alex was aware that he had even thought them.

'For heaven's sake!' she protested—but she agreed to call the doctor.

He sent her into hospital for tests and when she returned she told Alex that no signs of any disease had been found. While she had been away she had made up her mind to leave Riversdale.

'I appreciate all you have done for us,' she told him, 'but the atmosphere in this place depresses me. Even in hospital I was happier, and I know I shan't be really well until I leave here.'

With reluctance, Alex helped her to find a house and move. She had been the one stable influence in a shifting world, for although he had grown fond of his benefactors, they indulged him like a spoilt child. Joan did at least temper her love with criticism.

Once his mother met him when he was visiting Joan at her new home. She demanded that he keep away.

'I will not have you corrupting your sister,' she told him. 'You are living an evil life which you will regret. You must not harm your sister.'

In vain Alex protested that he only wanted to help, but his assistance, both economically and in person, was rejected. He did not visit Joan again, and when, several months later, he met his younger sister Pat in Manchester and learnt that Joan had been taken to hospital with terminal cancer, he refused to believe it—he refused even to think of it. A few weeks later he received a postcard from Joan: 'I am in hospital,' it read. 'Please don't forget me.'

Still he could not bring himself to face her. Hardening his heart, he told himself that if she was going to die she would have to get on with it; there was nothing he could do to stop it. His one thought was for her to get it over quickly to spare him suffering.

Then he heard that she had been discharged from hospital and his hopes lifted. Could the doctors and the tarot cards have been wrong? He hurried round Manchester filling a giant hamper with delicacies and fruit, and took it to his sister.

Barely ninety pounds in weight, she looked like a living skeleton.

'I thought you'd never come,' she whispered. 'Don't ever leave me alone again.'

Alex recalled all the good times they had had together as children, the shared confidences and companionship; he determined to do all he could to keep her.

'I've seen a marvellous fur coat, just your size,' he told her. 'As soon as you're on your feet I'm going to get it for you,

then you and Eric and I will go on a marvellous holiday. We've never had one together . . .'

He went on and on planning her future, willing her to make it come true. And she listened, a half-smile on her face, content that her brother had come to her at last.

7 Time of Atonement

Every day that Alex visited his sister he became aware of his helplessness in the face of her suffering. He wished his grandmother had taught him some way to get in touch with other witches for he felt certain that if he had had a coven, he would have had the power to help Joan. Realizing that his only hope lay in rejecting all he had gained through black witchcraft, he set about ridding himself of his possessions. Friends were invited to help themselves to the Chinese carpets, the crystal, the Victorian jewellery, the Georgian silver. Even his clothes were given away—everything the demonic powers had brought him.

Finally he had to face Ron and Maud. He could not tell them that he had been using them as agents of the devil, but he did say that his sister was dying and that he felt the only way he could square with his conscience was by breaking every link with the selfish life he had been leading. He asked them to let him go, and not to try to communicate with him or make enquiries about him. 'Only this way can I learn to live with myself,' he added.

Maud asked him to bring Joan to live at Riversdale, offering to engage nurses to look after her, and Ron could not under-

stand the necessity for Alex to return to poverty, but at length they agreed to all he asked on the condition that he write to them from time to time. He left on foot, with all that remained of his affluence in two suitcases.

Eric was relieved when Alex moved in with them and took over some of the nursing; he had been up most nights and, what with his job during the day, was nearing exhaustion. Now Alex bedded down on the settee in the living-room where Joan also slept, so that he would be on hand if she wanted anything. She was a difficult patient, ashamed of her incontinence and her inability to be silent when the pain was at its peak. She tormented her brother in every way she knew: she asked him to sing hymns, Christian hymns that reviled his witch god; she screamed that she was dying if he left her for more than a few minutes; and she tried to blame her suffering on his belief in witchcraft.

Aching with tension and fatigue, he would crawl under his blanket at night and fight his desire to sleep in order to invoke his god and beg for forgiveness that he knew he did not deserve. Do as you will to me, he prayed, but spare Joan.

As her agony increased in the days that followed, Joan would cry out to her brother to help her. 'You're always saying you have powers. . . . Why won't you use them to ease my pain?'

He would lay his hands on her forehead, protesting that it was hopeless since she did not believe in witchcraft, but his touch used to calm her and one day she grasped his hand and held it to her cheek, the first sign of affection she had shown him for weeks. 'You should lay your hands on sick people,' she told him. 'They aren't your hands when you do that, and they don't work for your devil. To the one who is suffering they are like angel's hands.'

When the doctor saw the end was in sight he sent her into hospital. Alex visited her each day. On the third evening the ward sister warned him that she was dying. 'Don't be alarmed if she doesn't recognize you,' she said. 'She's sinking fast and she doesn't realize where she is.'

Alex went up to the bed where Eric was holding his wife's hand, but there was nothing he could say, nothing he could do, and, blinded with tears, he left them alone together. Joan died a few hours later. She was thirty-one years old.

Witches believe that death is no escape; run away from a problem and an even greater one will await you. After the funeral Eric invited Alex to stay on with him and for a while he did, drifting aimlessly through the days, tired of living. He did contemplate suicide; there were drugs in the house, remnants of Joan's prescriptions, and he could always cut his wrists with his witch daggers. But he lacked the courage.

With no income and no savings he managed on one meal a day with Eric. Every evening he walked to the reference library where he delved into books on the Hebrew Abra-Melin system of magic, reputed to be of great value for purification. He studied the 360 magical symbols, each relating to an aspect of nature, and he began to feel that perhaps he could rehabilitate himself. The months of physical humility and menial drudgery had washed away some of the guilt inspired by his practice of black magic. Now he needed spiritual exercise to rid himself of it completely.

He was precipitated into action when in 1959 Eric decided to emigrate to Australia. Alex had no wish to stay on alone, and no money to go anywhere else. In the years since he had worked for the chemical firm, advances in the trade had been so great that his knowledge was now virtually useless. With no formal qualifications, he knew he could never get a similar job. Having lived—and dressed—like a lord for six years and having learnt something about men's fashions, he found a job in a wholesale outfitters, and after three weeks was promoted in charge of a section. He moved into two furnished rooms and set about preparing for the elaborate purification rites. For the next eleven months he was to spend all his available time and money acquiring the accoutrements demanded by the Abra-Melin instructions.

He who commenceth this operation in solitude can elect a place according to his pleasure where there is a small wood in the midst of which you shall make a small altar and you shall cover the same with a hut or shelter of fine branches so that the rain may not fall thereon and extinguish the lamp and the censer. Around the altar at a distance of seven paces you shall prepare a hedge of flowers, plants and green shrubs so that it may divide the entrance into two parts, the interior where the altar and tabernacle shall be placed after the manner of the temple, and the exterior which shall be as a portico thereunto.

Alex was miles away from any wood, however, so he simulated one in his room, having read in the statement, 'We shall rule and govern ourselves according to the means at our disposal.'

'The floor should be of wood,' commanded the book. Alex removed the lino and scrubbed the bare boards.

'The terrace on which we are to invoke the spirits should be covered with river sand to the depth of two fingers at least.' Alex helped himself to three-quarters of a hundredweight of sand from a nearby building site.

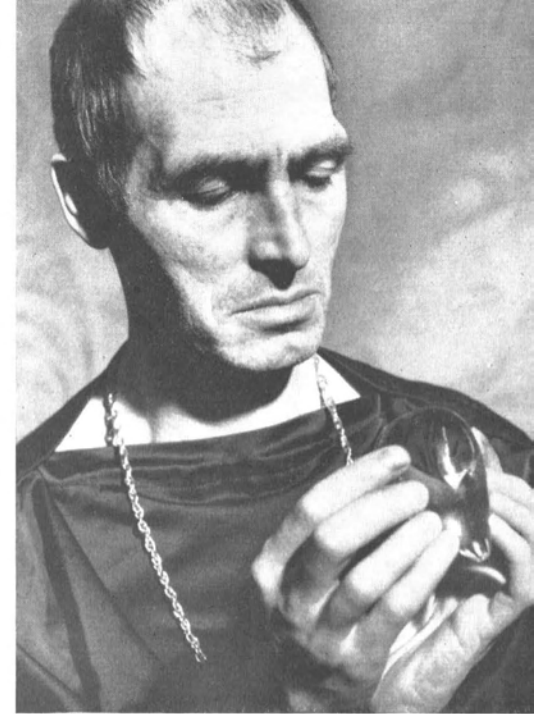
'A lamp of olive oil should burn,' but, unable to afford either lamp or oil, he bought candles.

'The altar should be hollow within where you shall keep all the necessary things such as the two robes, the crown or mitre, the wand, the oil, the girdle, the perfume and any other things which may be necessary.' Alex used a bedside cupboard.

The robes required were 'a shirt or tunic of linen, large and white, with well and properly made sleeves, and an outer robe of crimson or scarlet silk with gold, no longer than unto the knees. You shall make a girdle of silk the same colour as the tunic and you shall have on your head a beautiful crown or woven fillet of silk and gold.' Alex spent weeks seeking out suitable materials and hand-sewing the garments, and he made the crown from gold wire used for threading necklaces, and red velvet.

'A wand of almond tree, smooth and straight' was fashioned from a yard of dowelling.

Alex Sanders gazes into his crystal



Maxine blesses the athame over the altar, surrounded by incense smoke



Tarot cards set out for a 'reading'

The witches' circle. The objects within it include the pentacle, athame, censer, watchtower and *The Key of Solomon*

Maxine holds her knife before the altar



Inside the circle, watched by Alex and other witches, Maxine points her sword to the brass urn, the symbolic guardian of the watchtower

Alex honours the goddess by kneeling before Maxine, his high priestess, his hands looped in her girdle preparatory to removing the robe





Outdoors, Maxine lies on the ground while Alex holds the fith-fath to her breast so that she may breathe life into it via the cord

Witches dance naked round the circle to raise the power, while Alex, in robe, holds his sword to the full moon



'You shall pray to the holy angel that he may deign to sign or write upon a small square or plate of silver which you shall have made for this purpose.' He used the silver back of a hunter watch given him years ago by his mother.

Acquiring the equipment meticulously detailed in the book was but part of the performance; for eleven months he had to perform daily rituals.

If you be your own master as far as lieth in your purpose, free yourself of all your business and quit all mundane and vain company and conversation, leading a life tranquil, solitary and honest. If aforesometimes you have been a wicked, debauched, avaricious, luxurious and proud man, leave and flee from all these vices, consider that this was one of the principle reasons why Abraham, Moses, David, John and other holy men retired into desert places until they had acquired this holy science and magic.

Alex had to manage all this outside working hours. The house in which he lived had no bathroom and as the Abraham-Melin instructions demanded daily ritual bathing, he had to buy himself a tin bath. His bathwater had to be emptied so that no other person touched it, which meant frequent trips to the lavatory in the back yard.

When he felt he had mastered the understanding of the magic, the working of the rituals and the self-preparation, he chose a date for the ceremony: the Easter holiday when he would have three full days off work, the exact time required for the purification rites.

The ceremony was preceded by a nine-day fast when he could eat no food and drink nothing stronger than orange juice. Although the preparations were new to him, there was much in the ritual comparable to witchcraft, for while a magician is not necessarily a witch, many witches are also magicians, the chief difference being that a magician can work alone, and often must, whereas witches require a coven, and the gods they invoke have different names.

At the beginning of the three-day purification, Alex locked the door of his room and, like a giant that had wandered into Lilliput, sat down before his miniature forest and began to

call down the power—fearfully at first and then more boldly as the spells and incantations took hold of him. Day and night, with only brief pauses in which to drink water and sleep sitting down, he continued, never doubting that he would achieve what he sought, but having no clue as to how it would materialize.

Then, on the last day, he heard a rushing sound in the air; he felt faint and giddy, and saw little ridges forming in the sand before him. Obeying the instructions he had learnt by heart, he copied the words that appeared, one after the other, on the surface of the sand. The names were of spirits he had invoked. Then on the surface of the silver he saw a droplet which he took to be the mark of the angel. Repeating the names that had appeared in the sand, Alex asked the spirits to make themselves known, to help and advise him, to cleanse and comfort him. The air quivered and then became still, and the voice, when it spoke, seemed to come from all corners of the room.

'You are going to open what you have to the world. You will be persecuted as a result of it; you will lose friends, you will lose everything before you gain the reward of the work you have undertaken.'

There was a tremor in the air and then nothing. The spell was broken. Exhausted but elated, Alex tried not to be disappointed with the cryptic message; it did not offer much comfort, but he felt that his god must have forgiven him. He put away the regalia and restored the room to its everyday order.

Once he had recovered from the ordeal, he devoted his leisure to searching for other witches without revealing his own membership. One evening, watching a television feature programme at a friend's house, he heard a girl who claimed to be a witch, say, 'And then I raise my athame to bring the cone of power. . . .'

It was like a thunderbolt to Alex; those were the words from the *Book of Shadows*. Did the girl have a copy?

He wrote to the studios immediately, enclosing a letter to be forwarded to the girl. It was three weeks before he had a reply, inviting him to tell more about himself.

Alex wrote back that he was interested in witchcraft and would like to meet some real witches. A week or so later, on his afternoon off, a stranger called on him.

'I am a friend of the witch to whom you wrote,' he explained. 'She and her husband are having a little gathering of their coven this evening and they wondered if you would like to come.'

The young man took Alex to a house a few miles away and they were the first to arrive. Still keeping his witchcraft secret, Alex criticized himself for his caution, but old habits are not easily broken. As soon as he could he steered the conversation round to witchcraft rites, but the woman, who called herself a high priestess, vaguely referred to Diana the witch goddess, and refused to be drawn on details. Alex cheered up when the others arrived and the hostess told the assembled party of eight that they would now cast the circle.

Once again he was disappointed, however, for instead of bringing out the sword and athame, the altar and the pentacles, as he and his grandmother had done on their own, the group assembled dining chairs and made a circle similar to that of a spiritualist meeting. Tentatively Alex questioned the rites but the participants sincerely believed that they were practising witchcraft. Perhaps he *was* the only witch left.

Time has taught Alex that many covens use rituals quite different from those handed down by his grandmother, but most of them do have basic similarities, like the names of the Guardians of the Watchtowers, the symbolic cardinal points of the circle—Boreas at the north, Zephyrus at the west, Eurus at the east and Notus at the south. At this time, however, he was inexperienced in the practices of other groups and he was keenly disappointed. On the drive back he admitted as much to the young man who had brought him, and told him he would not be coming again.

'I don't blame you,' was the reply. 'They've been promising

to initiate me for weeks and I am beginning to think they don't know how to.'

Alex questioned him closely and decided to trust him. 'I am a witch, initiated to the third grade,' he announced, and explained that he could take no part in pseudo-seances such as they had just witnessed. They were not even imitations of genuine esbats—or coven meetings. He added that he was trying to find means of recognizing real witches so that he could practise his cult with them.

'Initiate me,' urged his companion. 'Then you would have a coven of two, and I promise I shall do all you ask of me.'

Alex explained that no male witch may initiate another male, nor a female a female. The natural laws of witchcraft, which regard homosexuality as a denial of the basic tenet of fertility, insist on man always being paired with woman, especially in a ceremony as personal as initiation.

A few days later the young man returned and asked if Alex would accompany him to the home of some friends who might be able to help. 'They are devout Christians, evangelists, but they are eager to obey the teachings of the Old Testament and talk with angels, and they might be prepared to use witchcraft to do so.'

Bill and Eunice turned out to be crusaders in revivalist Christianity and while Bill was quite willing to invoke alien gods, his wife was reluctant. She felt it disobeyed the teachings of Christ.

'But the apostles themselves said, "Seek ye good gifts,"' Alex told her, 'and one of the gifts they listed was to speak with angels. Would you deny your husband the right to obey, just because you are bigoted?'

She admitted her bias but asked for more details before committing herself. Alex explained that he had mastered the Abra-Melin system of magic which, while akin to witchcraft, was different in that it could be practised by non-witches, and messages could come from beyond this world.

At length it was agreed that the three of them, with the couple's twelve-year-old son, would co-operate to work the

magic. They knew that it would take months of preparations before they could even begin the actual ceremony. They had to make ceremonial swords with brass handles, incense burners and diaphanous robes, and had to prepare themselves by studying the symbols which would help them interpret any messages they might receive.

Night after night Alex hurried to his friends' house after work to teach and train them, but he wished that he could find means of furthering his witch knowledge beyond his grandmother's teachings so that he might incorporate witchcraft with magic, making them both more potent. He voiced his thoughts to Bill, who advised him to go to the Rylands Library in Manchester. 'I've heard they have priceless old manuscripts and even a copy of *The Key of Solomon*. Isn't that a sort of witches' manual?' he asked.

Alex confirmed that *The Key of Solomon* was one of the few storehouses of witchcraft to have come down through the ages very much in its original form, and admitted that he had had no idea there were any copies in existence outside the British Museum.

The next day Alex was called to his manager's office and told that his services were no longer required.

'I have no fault to find with your work,' his boss told him. 'But it has been brought to my notice that you are a witch and that you make no secret of it.'

Although his *Book of Shadows* permitted him to deny his allegiance, Alex felt that his job had served its purpose in giving him the time and the money to establish himself without recourse to black witchcraft. He confessed he was a witch and agreed to leave at the end of the week. Determined not to be forced to live on his wits, he began searching immediately for another job. In the 'situations vacant' column of the paper that evening he came across the advertisement, 'Book duster wanted for large city library. Apply John Rylands Library, Manchester'.

Alex wrote out his application immediately and two days later was invited for an interview. As soon as he entered the building he felt at home. Built as a memorial to a Lancashire

cotton merchant who was a devout Christian, the library was a monument of stone and wood. While at first appearance it looked like a church, a keener glance recognized the hallmark of a stonemason trained in witchcraft. Peering out from the top of pillars were little stone mice with devils' faces; cats, demons, imps and dragons crouched in corners and crevices. In the boardroom where the interview took place, Alex had difficulty keeping his eyes off the magnificent framed papyrus specimens on the walls and the Egyptian bills of sale for servants.

The wages, explained the library official, were very low; only eight pounds a week which, in 1963, was about the lowest rate for any job. Alex assured him that the money did not matter; he loved books and wanted to care for them. The official eyed him curiously, surprised and pleased to find a man who, though obviously cheaply clad, could disdain money for the sake of books. He was engaged on the spot.

For Alex, going to work was like going to a temple. Dressed in his only good suit, he presented himself in the front hall the next Monday morning. He was shown round the library and told which books and manuscripts he should dust, how he should handle them and how he should polish the tooled leather bindings. For the first hour of each day he was to dust the manuscript cases and furniture on the main floor, then he must make his way to the sub-basement where, in a maze of tunnels, each brightly lit and subdivided into smaller tunnels, he could begin his secret work of harvesting the knowledge he sought.

It took him a few days to find the Egyptian section. From then on few books were dusted, as Alex filled notebook after notebook with details of rituals, invocations and plans. The day he found *The Key of Solomon* he forgot to go for his lunch, so engrossed was he in the chants, many of which had been used by his grandmother in her esbats and sabbaths. The other books were discarded; this was the real key, for it married the knowledge he had to that which he had hoped for. But he wondered how he would ever manage to copy it all—

it would take years to draw the many pentacles and elaborate Hebrew symbols.

It was Bill who suggested a daring solution; if the book could be borrowed he would arrange to have photostat copies made of each page. But when Alex tried to hide it under his jacket, he cut such a ludicrous figure that he knew he would be caught before he got out of the door. He decided to dismantle *The Key of Solomon* and borrow a few pages at a time, hiding the remains behind other books in the knowledge that no one else would be aware of its disappearance.

The first time he left the library with a small roll of the precious pages wedged under his jacket, he expected the custodian's restraining hand on his shoulder at every step. Bill took them to work and had them copied and Alex returned them to the library to exchange them for a fresh batch. Eventually the daily borrowing of the manuscript became almost routine.

Later he was to regret his complacency. If he had bothered to use his powers of clairvoyance, he might have glimpsed trouble ahead.

8 In Search of Angels

An item in a local newspaper about two young men who were planning an experiment in mysticism prompted Alex to write to them asking if he could help. Their reply sent him hurrying to meet them at a rendezvous in Wilmslow, Cheshire, near which one had a week-end cottage. They were planning to practise magic in order to raise the devil. Since Alex, as a witch, did not consider the devil an evil figure, but a little god or assistant angel, he was glad to take part.

When they had perfected their arrangements for the purification and setting out of the room, they invited Alex to spend the evening with them at the cottage. Alex took no part in the drawing of the circle; this was to be their experiment and he co-operated only by explaining Hebrew rituals that might be incorporated. Both young men were knowledgeable in the various systems of magic but they knew nothing of witchcraft. They were practising Christians, one being the honorary treasurer of a Christian association. Both came from upper-class county families and were keeping details of the experiment strictly secret. Devil-raising was not likely to be appreciated by either their parents or their employers.

Diligently they followed the elaborate ritual, invoking the

devil, reciting incantations and offering Alex as a medium by which it might manifest itself. For a while nothing happened, then the temperature seemed to fluctuate wildly and there was pandemonium. A tiled coffee table whizzed overhead, smashing itself into fragments against the wall. A heavy oak chest careered across the room and crashed into an armchair behind one of the men. A typewriter hurled itself into the air, narrowly missed Alex, who was ducking and dodging with the others, and landed in one corner, a twisted mass of wreckage. Then Alex felt a rush of wind and found himself being thrown across the room. Summoning all his courage, he called out the exorcism to banish the powers, urging his companions to do likewise. The dust settled and the power ebbed away.

'We must never meet again,' Alex told them as he surveyed the wreckage. 'Any one of us could have been killed; we are obviously playing with powers beyond our control and I, for one, don't like it.'

Although the men had said nothing to suggest they were dabbling in black magic, Alex felt that the manifestation could only have been caused by evil, even though it might have been in the subconscious of one of them.

The three of them cleaned up the damage and, swearing to each other to keep their escapade a secret, they promised never to repeat the experiment nor to meet Alex again.

But one of them talked. A garbled version of his story found its way to a local newspaper and a reporter wrote to Alex asking for his comments before he wrote a detailed feature article about the incident. Alex knew that the publicity would damage his already shaken friends, including whichever one had irresponsibly broken his vow of silence, and he bargained with the reporter not to use the story but a better one that Alex would give him. The reporter agreed and Alex arranged to set up a coven meeting where the reporter and a photographer could witness an initiation ceremony. Obviously it would not be a genuine ritual, but the newspapermen were content so long as it was an authentic magic ritual of some sort.

Alex rounded up Bill and four other friends, hastily decorated robes with replicas of the magic symbols gleaned from *The Key of Solomon*, and laid on an initiation ceremony compounded half of Egyptian magic and half of witchcraft. Deep in the woods at Alderley Edge outside Manchester they performed their homogenized ritual, the like of which had never been done before nor ever would be again. It was quite meaningless except to the journalists who described it in their article as 'black magic' and illustrated it with photographs of the prostrate figures in decorated robes.

When Alex arrived for work the following Monday morning, he was shown into the librarian's office. The photographs of Alex at his rituals had been recognized by the library staff over the week-end, and so had the Egyptian symbols on his clothes. How, they asked, could a humble book-duster know so much about oriental mysticism unless he had access to priceless books such as those in the John Rylands Library? An immediate search was ordered. The Egyptian section was found to be the best dusted, but not all the books were in their correct places. A further search revealed the absence of *The Key of Solomon*.

At first Alex denied taking the book and tried to bluff it out. Then he admitted that he had borrowed it, but only a few pages at a time. Where then, were the covers and the remains he had supposedly brought back? Alex was not allowed to join in the search himself, but he explained as best he could where he thought he had hidden them, behind some other books on another shelf. He was told he was suspended from duty until they had been found, and he was sent home to await punishment.

One of the seniors, believing Alex was telling the truth, and would return any pages he still had at home, offered to try to keep the job open for him. 'I am sure you have been very misguided, practising witchcraft,' he bargained. 'If you promise to go straight, perhaps you will be able to stay on.'

Indignantly Alex told him he was a real witch, trained by

his grandmother, and that the only reason he had sought work in the Library had been to gain access to *The Key of Solomon*.

That afternoon, while awaiting the return of the pages being photographed, Alex was visited by two detectives. Library officials had reported the loss to the police but had not preferred charges. The detectives took one look at the circle he had painted on the floor and said, 'You surely don't believe in that bloody rubbish, do you?'

'Don't you dare set foot inside that circle,' warned Alex, forgetting his precarious position. 'If you value your lives you'll keep your distance from it, or you'll be taking things from this room that you'll never get rid of.'

They sniggered, but both took care not to step inside the symbols. They then explained that they had come to collect the book he had stolen, and refused to believe that, apart from the few pages still being photographed, it was in fact in the library. Alex agreed to accompany them there and find it for them under their supervision, but in his distress he had forgotten where he had hidden it, and all afternoon he and his observers ransacked the shelves, to the dismay of the library staff whose job it was to put everything back. Eventually, to the surprise of everyone, Alex found the dismantled book, but the detectives still doubted that he had only borrowed it.

'In any case, with a book as valuable as this, you'll probably be sent to prison; you've dismantled it and you've admitted there are still some pages missing,' said one.

Alex was allowed to go home on condition that the remaining pages were in the hands of the police by eight o'clock that night. 'Ask for me when you come to police headquarters,' said one detective, a sergeant, giving his name. 'Then I'll let you know what the charges are you'll have to answer to.'

The idea of prison was too terrible for Alex to consider. He hurried to Stockport to collect the pages from Bill, then raced to his rooms where he threw off his clothes, assembled his regalia and worked witchcraft for himself. He prayed to

the powers to keep him from prison, to keep him from being charged with a theft he had not committed. He prayed to be able to leave the police station that night a free man. He barely had time to get dressed before he had to run to catch the bus to the police headquarters. He arrived just a few minutes before eight o'clock.

He knocked at the first door he came to inside the corridor and it was opened by a policeman. Inside were about thirty others sitting in rows, typing. Alex explained that he had been asked to hand a package to the sergeant, whom he named. He was told that the sergeant had been called away on an urgent case and would not be back for a few days. Thankfully Alex left the package with him and made his escape. The next day he received a registered letter from the library enclosing his National Insurance cards and telling him that his services were no longer required. He knew then that the matter had ended.

Once again he was without money or work, but this time he was not an outcast from his religion. He felt that he had atoned for his excursion into black witchcraft and could now embark on the work for which he felt destined. But first he must make time to learn by heart all that Solomon's book could teach him about witchcraft.

Pocketing his pride, he went to visit his benefactors and explain that his period in the wilderness was now over. Ron tried to persuade him to come and live with them, and Maud, who seemed to have finally accepted the death of her son, joined in the invitation. 'We'll do all we can to help you,' she promised. But Alex knew that this was not the way. Instead he was grateful to accept a small weekly allowance, just enough to feed him frugally, and a few hundred pounds with which he bought a small, run-down terraced house in Oldham Road, in the Newton Heath district of Manchester.

He applied himself to study each day, and each evening he taught Bill and Eunice as his grandmother had taught him. Despite their being Christian evangelists, they decided they wanted to be initiated into witchcraft. In a simple ceremony, using the ancient rituals but without drawing blood, he made

Eunice a witch. A few weeks later, she in turn initiated her husband. Alex had his first coven even if it didn't quite run to eleven witches, a high priest and a high priestess. Although the pair were only first-grade witches, they had been properly initiated. It was a start.

To fulfil Bill's wish to call upon lesser angels, they used Solomon's system of magic. Angels, in the language of magic, are not the winged creatures of the Christians, nor are they the souls of the dead. They are spirits drawn from the godhead, or central power of the universe, which magicians and witches alike believe can be petitioned to help and advise those mortals who follow the correct rituals.

Bill and Eunice agreed to let their twelve-year-old son be used to draw the power; a virgin child representing purity is believed to find favour with the spirits.

For a week beforehand they had been making preparations, the most arduous of which was the gathering of four pounds of rose petals to be dried and made into incense. They could be picked only between the early morning hours of two and three, according to the magic ritual, and as they had no roses of their own, the coven made forays into gardens all over the neighbourhood until there was not a rose to be seen in the entire district.

They charted an elaborate circle surrounded by pentacles and the symbolic watchtowers. The child sat a little apart in a small triangle. He was to be used as a medium through which voices might speak.

At seven o'clock in the evening they took their places within the circle and began their incantations. The rose-scented incense filled the room. Hour after hour they called to the gods, repeating the chants and secret names according to the instructions in *The Key of Solomon*, but without result. At midnight they began all over again, remaining silent in between the invocations. Suddenly the boy stiffened and cried out, 'Fear, fear, fear,' and fell over as if asleep. When they shook him awake he could not remember having spoken.

Alex wondered if this, in fact, had been the message, and he asked Bill if he was afraid to continue.

'Of course I'm not,' he replied, but Eunice was. She admitted that she was hating every minute of it; every wisp of smoke terrified her and she was sure she would faint if an angel so much as breathed on her.

'You can't give up now,' Alex protested, and he asked Bill to give her a glass of wine to reinforce her courage. Once again they made the circle, lit the incense and began their ritual. After a while the smoke began to whirl in patterns about the centre of the circle, but nothing else happened and Bill became despondent.

'It's no use,' he sighed, 'it won't work . . .'

His son's voice interrupted him, strangely strong and deep.

'What is it you seek?'

Instantly Bill made his demand. 'I want to see an angel.'

'Which angel?'

While Bill hesitated, Alex said, 'Michael, the archangel.'

'Try for ten days,' said the voice, the last words fading.

They tried to recall it to find out what it meant, but without success. Alex decided they could not leave it at that; he removed the magic circle and made a simple witches' ring. He and Eunice stepped inside it and he invoked the spirits and demanded to know what had to be done.

'You are to get the circle with a crystal in it,' was the reply.

'But I don't know of such a circle,' he argued. 'Where am I to get it?'

'The magus, the magus,' repeated the voice.

'What is it? Is it a book?'

'Yes.'

'But where shall I find it?'

'Where books are, in a library,' was the reply.

But it was not in the library when he went the next day; it had been stolen. The librarian suggested he try the library at Manchester University, and there Alex was able to read a copy of *The Magus* by Sir Francis Barrett, first published in the early nineteenth century. In it he found described the layout of a black circle containing an egg-shaped crystal through which angels would manifest themselves. After

making detailed notes of the incantations, Alex, joined by Bill, began his search for the crystal in antique shops in the city. Eventually they found one.

For ten nights they set up the new circle within the old and gazed through the incense smoke into the crystal, and on the tenth night the angel appeared in it. Its message was brief and, to Alex, a great disappointment. It instructed Bill not to withdraw from his Christian beliefs, but to spread the teaching of his religion by holding classes where people could learn that faith should bring happiness.

Eunice and Bill were satisfied with the experiment and relieved to relinquish their witchhood which, they felt, had nothing to offer them. They had no wish to know the future now that they felt their faith had been confirmed. They thanked Alex for having made this proof possible, and resolved to have nothing more to do with the occult.

Once again Alex was alone, except for a girl, Margot, and her fiancé, who had studied what little they could about witchcraft and who now asked to be initiated. Alex began to form another coven, bitterly resenting the witch law, framed in darker days, which forbade a witch using his powers to seek out other witches. Although he reasoned that witch-hunts no longer existed, and therefore there was no danger in one witch knowing the whereabouts of another, he did not have the moral courage to break a law so deeply instilled into him by his grandmother. But he felt impelled to continue his search. Apart from the solace he drew from the company of fellow worshippers, he was intent on spreading the cult and removing from it the stigma of evil.

9 The Unwelcome Apprentice

After initiating Margot and letting her initiate her fiancé, Alex began to found a full coven. The secret witch ring, given him by his grandmother at his own initiation, was brought out of its hiding-place and altered to fit him. Now he wore it in public and often people queried the significance of its cabalistic symbols. Alex took the opportunity of spreading the word. It was easier than he had thought, for although many shied at the word 'pagan', they were intrigued by the promise of clairvoyance and the ability to influence the future. When the first coven reached full strength, another was formed, then another, and because so many outsiders were keen to learn about witchcraft, Alex found himself being engaged as a lecturer and invited to speak on television. He used the fees he earned to take a flat in Chorlton where he could hold seminars one night a week to answer questions and allow those sufficiently interested to meet the member of one of his covens. Many visitors asked to be initiated and within a year or so he had covens in many parts of the country.

Not all the initiates could be investigated fully, however, and Alex had some unpleasant surprises. One eighteen-year-



Wearing their robes, witches walk to the covenstead or witches' ring

Calling down the power





The symbolic sex act—
Maxine plunges the
athame into the chalice



To bring money or prosperity to a petitioner, the witches
pass a pentacle round the outside of the circle



The witches' altar.
Beside it lies the *Book of Shadows*



Having brought down the power, the witches fall to the ground



Fertility rites: the witches, in pairs, leap over the cauldron

The notorious black mass—nothing more than a feast in the circle which witches believe is shared with their god



old boy from the Midlands was initiated into Alex's coven and worked diligently until he felt he was ready for the second grade. Before taking it, he had to prove that he could really draw down the power, direct it to a successful conclusion and be able to banish it. (Experienced witches say that they can see the power as a blue light that surrounds the circle.) He invited Alex to spend the week-end at his home. The evening before the initiation was to take place, they went up to the bedroom which had been prepared. In it was a single bed for Alex and a sleeping-bag for the host. The boy wanted to experiment with fire rituals and they invoked the god Set to protect them. Alex drew the circle—literally with chalk on the bare floorboards, and spiritually with his athame. The perimeter of the circle enclosed the bed but not the sleeping-bag. Then they called down the power and the boy began to light some methylated spirit, planning to pour it over himself without being burnt—as he had seen Alex do. But a few drops fell on the floor and scorched the boards. Immediately he abandoned the experiment, too afraid to continue.

After performing a few more rituals and successfully proving that he could raise power, the boy went to his sleeping-bag and Alex to his bed. They did not banish the power, but let it remain in the hope that it would cause them to see visions in their sleep.

The bed and the sleeping-bag were about six feet apart. In the far corner of the room a paraffin stove gave off a faint blue light. Some time during the night Alex awoke suddenly. There was no noise, but he was aware of a movement from his companion. Now wide awake, Alex saw the boy slither, reptile fashion, from the sleeping-bag, seemingly without using his hands or arms. His bare arms and shoulders were glistening and glowing faintly green, and as he inched across the floor, his entire body seemed to swell. As he reached the bed, his mouth inclined towards Alex's neck. Alex waited no longer; he remembered he was still inside the circle and therefore under the protection of any god he cared to invoke. He called out the invocation to banish the danger, and, as he

spoke, he saw his companion shrink to the floor and retreat to the sleeping-bag.

Alex did not go to sleep again. When dawn broke he woke up the boy and asked him what he knew about vampires. Surprised, he admitted that he had read several books about them and was deeply interested. He was astounded to hear of his behaviour during the night and was most apologetic. Alex told him that there could be no question of his being initiated into the second grade, or even of his remaining a witch at all; he obviously had the ability to arouse dark powers which, done subconsciously, could be a danger to himself and those around him unless he ceased to practise magic altogether. The last Alex heard of him he had become a black magician and was mixing in dubious company, whose practices included animal sacrifice and blood drinking.

Most of the witches recruited by Alex remained constant, however, and those who reached the third grade were given the opportunity to form their own covens. Usually he reserved the right to accept or reject applications for membership, but not always.

For some time he had been seeing a man and his wife in both his crystal and his tarot cards. The man bore the symbols of a son, even though he was not all that young, and the wife was in witch's clothing. The pair kept appearing together, growing nearer all the time. When Alex met them for the first time he did not recognize either of them.

Over the years he occasionally came across a woman who had been the sick-bay attendant at the chemical works where he had worked as a young man. She had married since and often asked him home to meet her husband and children, but he never seemed to have the time. Then she bumped into him again when he was recruiting his covens. She remarked that she had heard him speak on television and that though she, as a Roman Catholic, did not approve of his being a witch, she was interested in the occult. Perhaps he might like to study an Indonesian cult she had heard about. She gave Alex the name of a book and suggested he borrow it from the public library.

Months later he did, and after he had read it, he found a note tucked in the back flap asking the reader to write to a certain address if he would like more information. Alex did so and received a reply inviting him to a meeting in Manchester the following week. The first person he met there was Mrs Morris, his friend from the factory.

'We must be destined to get together,' she laughed, and she asked him to her home the following week to tell some of her friends about witchcraft.

It was an enjoyable evening, for most of the guests had a lively interest in the occult. One who most certainly did not was Maxine, Mrs Morris's elder daughter, a tall, quiet girl of seventeen, who actually was afraid of fringe religions. (When her mother had announced her intention of inviting a witch to the house, Maxine had wanted to tell a priest.) She fulfilled her duties as assistant hostess but in the main kept apart from the guests. In return no one took any notice of her, least of all Alex who, at thirty-seven, regarded her as a child and a not-too-friendly one at that.

Alex formed the habit of visiting the Morris home once a week and often he would take his tarot cards. One evening he saw the death of Victor Morris in the very near future. Reluctant though he was to distress Mrs Morris, he had to tell her, for failure to disclose the truth of a vision is to abuse the witch law. Victor Morris had been an epileptic for years, but he was in good health, and everyone—except Alex—was surprised when he died of a heart attack a few weeks later. The fulfilment of the prophecy, however, set the seal on Alex's success with the group and after that everyone clamoured to have their future told. Everyone, that is, except Maxine.

One week-end Alex's old friend Bill invited him over while Eunice was away. He was planning to go to London to meet an elderly magician and he invited Alex to go with him. He asked him specially to bring his tarot cards.

Alex imagined he had some problem and needed help, but he was not prepared for what happened soon after he had

arrived at Bill's home. In the middle of tea the doorbell rang and a party arrived: two attractive girls, two older women and an incredibly brash young man called Paul.

'Will you read the tarot cards for them?' Bill asked Alex a trifle sheepishly, knowing how he hated 'performing'.

'If you had warned me I could have come dressed as a clown,' Alex retorted. Nevertheless, he could not refuse without causing offence.

He shuffled the cards and set them out, but no coherent symbols came. Astounded, he reshuffled them again and again. For almost an hour he found himself laying out meaningless arrangements of the cards until he realized that his own hostility towards the brash young man was impeding his powers. Taking himself in hand, he tried once again and this time the future appeared.

He enjoyed breaking the news to this cocksure youth in his hand-tailored suit and silk shirt. 'You'll be lucky if you're still out of prison this time next month,' Alex told him. 'You are spending hundreds of pounds belonging to other people, without their permission. . . . You are engaged to a girl but you won't marry her; she'll refuse to have you. . . .'

Suddenly Alex stopped. Something inside him was saying, 'This is the person you are waiting for, the person who has appeared in your crystal as your spiritual son. This is the one you must train as your apprentice.' He hoped he had misheard; the idea of encouraging this young braggart was objectionable. He cut short his reading and did not protest when the party broke up.

Bill was dismayed at Alex's antipathy to his guests, and tried to excuse the boy. 'There's nothing the matter with him that time won't cure,' he said, but Alex was not convinced. He could not account for his irrational aversion to the youth, but he could not banish it.

Alex had not seen the last of Paul, however. An hour later he was back. He had driven the women home, and then his car had broken down. He stayed the night at Bill's, and the next morning asked if he could accompany them to London.

'I've just got to go into Stockport first and then I'll be free to go with you,' he said.

Against Alex's protests, Bill agreed to wait. After Paul had gone Alex tried to make him change his mind, but he was adamant. 'You are letting prejudice blind you,' he said. 'There is no harm in the boy, and you upset him badly last night. The least we can do is be sociable.'

The accusation struck home, but before Alex could reply the telephone rang. It was Paul, in Stockport, and in desperate trouble. He had gone to the bank to find that he had overdrawn not only his own account but also the one he shared with his fiancée; his most recent cheques would not be honoured and payment of several large bills was already overdue. Bill told him to come straight back and he would try to advise him.

It was a subdued young man who arrived soon after, and as he sat in the chair, head in hands, not knowing which way to turn, Alex found it in his heart to be sorry for him. He dropped his objections and urged Paul to go with them to London to give them time to decide what to do. Paul was all for making a run for it, but the others convinced him that that was not the way. At length he agreed to go with them. 'I'll ask your old magician to get me out of this hole,' he said.

But the old magician had no answer. He shook his head at Paul's facetious question and refused to give advice. 'You don't need me to help you see what lies ahead. Not only have you a good friend here'—he pointed to Alex—'but you yourself could have the gift of prophecy if you'd only care to use it.' Paul thought he was senile and took no more notice of him.

They were spending that night at Lingfield in Surrey where Alex had been invited to initiate a witch, the wife of a man who had belonged to his first coven in Manchester and who had since moved south. While the ceremony was taking place, Bill and Paul stayed in another room, and later Bill slept in the guest-room while Alex and Paul had camp beds in the dining-room.

After he had turned off the light, Alex talked for a while

with Paul before turning over to go to sleep. A few minutes later wind swept through the room. The air trembled and grew hot as if an oven door had been opened. Paul's voice broke the silence. 'I can't breathe . . . a weight on my chest . . .'

Alex was tense with excitement. He had read and heard of the spontaneous power that could surge unbidden into people who, often unknown to themselves, were born witches but had never been trained or initiated. This was happening to Paul. Alex sprang out of bed and asked if he needed help.

'No,' Paul gasped. 'Leave me alone.'

'Do you realize what is happening to you?'

'I think so . . .'

Paul's voice tailed off. Gradually the temperature returned to normal and his heavy breathing grew calmer. He wiped the perspiration from his face and sat up, looking about the shadowy room.

'Is it always like that?' he asked Alex.

Carefully, Alex explained that usually initiates sought the power, not the other way round, but that Paul could not be a full member of the brotherhood until he had been formally initiated and had taken the oath. He would need a special ceremony. Fortunately Alex had been preparing for such an eventuality ever since he had first read about spontaneous initiates and the need for them to be bound by ritual. He described the ornate white robes that Paul would want, on which Alex had already stitched hundreds of pearls, and the scarlet velvet stole—both part of the three-hour-long ritual which dated back to the Books of the Dead of the Egyptian Pharaohs.

'But that isn't like the ceremony you performed tonight. It lasted only an hour or so,' Paul said. Alex had to tell him that in his case two initiations were in order, the first being Egyptian form, which lasts for all time, the second being the normal first-grade initiation.

'Isn't the witches' initiation binding, then?' Paul asked. Alex told him that whereas a witch can be cursed by his elder and banished from the coven, no one on earth has the authority

or power to banish one who has taken the Egyptian form of oath.

In spite of his being chosen by the powers to be a witch, Paul could not be initiated and shown how to use the magic until Alex was ready, and the more he saw of his young apprentice the more he realized that power in such hands would be abused. As brash as ever, despite his debts and the possibility of his being taken to court, Paul firmly believed he was God's gift to women. 'Why worry?' he would say to Alex with a shrug, when warned against breaking up happy courtships. 'Those girls come when I whistle—they've only themselves to blame if they get hurt.'

Not always patiently, Alex would expound the ideals of witchcraft and read out extracts from the secret book of witch law which demands that all men honour all women, not only because they are the receptacles of the future, but because they represent the goddess on earth. He encouraged Paul to sit in with the group of theology students from the university who attended classes under Alex—now an acknowledged authority on witchcraft—as part of their study of comparative religions. Twice a week during the term they visited his Chorlton rooms and delved into the dogma, history and beliefs of all forms of witchcraft, both English and Egyptian.

Paul became interested in the tutorials, and as he realized that no restrictions would be put on his sexual appetites providing they were not used promiscuously, he began preparing for his formal initiation.

10 Relic of the Past

All this time Alex was waiting for the girl he had seen in the crystal, sure that she would materialize through Paul, with whom she always appeared.

That Christmas he took Paul with him to a party held by friends of Mrs Morris. Most of the guests were in their teens and twenties and, feeling rather old and out of place, Alex sat by the fire while the others danced. Maxine too sat out, listening to the music. Then, as Alex looked across at her, he saw a change come over her. She straightened up and stared at him, her mouth slightly open. Her long fair hair, which she wore piled up, slipped out of its ribbon and fell about her shoulders. Her face seemed to glow with well-being. One by one the dancing couples drew to one side and watched in amazement.

'Do you know what is happening?' Alex asked her.

'Oh, yes,' she said, but was unable to put it into words.

Afterwards she compared the feeling to when she was a child lying in a field of long grass one hot summer day. As she lay there, her horizon bounded by the green about her and the blue above, she felt part of the earth, the grass and the sky. It was exactly the feeling she had when she first felt the

power of witchcraft that winter evening. It never left her again.

As a child Maxine had been educated at St Joseph's Convent in Blackley, Manchester. She was a devout Catholic, her religion having been the one stable feature in a somewhat chequered childhood. Her father's epilepsy had prevented his having a steady job, but her mother was devoted to him and she kept the family for months at a time on the money she earned, first as a nurse and then as a store detective. Despite the financial insecurity, both Maxine and her little sister had enjoyed a happy childhood. The prospect of deserting Mother Church for anything as hapless as witchcraft did not come naturally to her—but she felt powerless to resist.

Now that Maxine had showed herself to be a natural witch, Alex felt sure that she and Paul would find each other, but in fact they experienced absolutely no mutual attraction or respect. Each time he drew down the power and conjured up his familiars, Alex was finding that he could not get through to instruct them. All he was told was to fulfil his destiny by training the young couple. Annoyed at finding himself balked, he called a coven meeting and told the group that he was going to put himself in a trance so that the powers could speak through him. He promised that he would obey any instructions that came and he told his high priest and high priestess to write down anything that was said.

The results were astounding. A voice was heard, that of a middle-aged man who called himself Nick Dermdike. In broad Lancashire accents sprinkled with oaths, he claimed to have been a Lancashire witch in the early seventeenth century. He had been thrown into gaol but before being taken had flung his athame into a brook near Whalley Abbey where it lay rotting to this day. Nick laughed rudely at Alex's predicament and declared that he should do as he was told and initiate the pair, and that they would need to be bound to the art—he called it 'Wicca', the old English name for witchcraft—as fast as possible.

When Alex came out of his trance the others could not

wait to get to Whalley Abbey to search for the knife. Despite its being the early hours of the morning they would have left there and then if Alex had not restrained them. Having been unaware of his body's occupant, he was less excited than his fellows. But at daybreak the whole coven piled into their cars and set off for the ruined Abbey where, according to their invisible informant, the Lancashire witches used to hatch their plots to overthrow the king and re-establish the monasteries. Nick claimed to have been a monk as well as a witch, and if he was telling the truth his vulgarity brought no credit to either religion.

They had to park their cars some distance from where the brook was supposed to be. By the time they had reached the lower slopes beyond the meadows bordering the road their feet were soaking wet. The February air was heavy with mist. Before long they had blundered upon the brook—only now it had grown into a river.

'How are we going to find anything in this?' Alex asked in dismay as he viewed the wide expanse of water rippling over its rocky bed.

The others brushed aside his protests and insisted that they knew exactly where to look. Nick had described the spot exactly in relation to the Abbey. Ignoring the icy water lapping round their ankles, three of the men waded into the stream, carefully shifting the larger stones with their feet.

Alex gave up his protests and went off to have a cigarette. He could not believe that a knife could stay preserved for three hundred years. In addition, he was distinctly annoyed that he had let his body be used by the spirit of a dead person. He thought he had put all that behind him when he gave up spiritualism. He had discovered that acting as a receptacle for the dead was exhausting, and offered none of the stimulation of playing host to one's own created familiars.

'We've got it!' The shout echoed through the hills. Alex rushed over to have a look. It was a miserable weapon, mottled green and pitted with corrosion; the handle disintegrated as soon as they touched it. He scraped away some

of the fungus with his nail and revealed a symbol, more secret than the pentacle, deeply engraved in the metal. There was no doubt but that this was a witch's athame. Shaken by the discovery and by the potentiality of having a genuine seventeenth-century witch as an informant, they drove back to Manchester bearing their precious relic.

Later, Alex overcame his reluctance and agreed he should go into trance again so that Nick might speak. But Nick had other ideas; right from the start he came only when he had something to say, and he refused to be conjured up by the coven. Assured that he would not have his energy sapped by trivial chatter, Alex was never again loth to offer his body to the long-dead witch.

In accordance with the instructions, Alex began preparing for the first ceremony for his two spontaneous initiates. The most binding oaths he could find were contained in some old manuscripts belonging to one of his colleagues, Pat, the descendant of a witch who had been burnt at the stake. Her grandfather had been a friend of one of the greatest Egyptologists of the age, Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, whose feats towards the end of the last century included the excavation of the pyramids at Giza and the great temple at Tanis, as well as the discovery of the Greek city of Naucratis and the towns of Am and Daphnae, where remains of the Pharaohs had been found. He had given some of his papers to Pat's grandfather, among them the initiation ceremony of a religion closely related to witchcraft. The god and goddess had different names, but the instructions on calling down the power and on how to use it were identical. This ceremony included the gilding and symbolic embalming of novices so that they might be reborn, and with it Alex swore Paul and Maxine into the cult, having first had to 'adopt' them as his son and daughter. As they lay on the altar before him, side by side in their ornate white robes, Alex realized the truth of his vision. They were bound not to each other as man and wife, as he had interpreted the vision in his crystal, but to him.

Two weeks later they came before the whole coven and had the normal initiation ceremony. Maxine, daughter of a strict father, dreaded the ordeal of appearing naked before others. Nor had she ever seen a naked man. With eyes down-cast she waited at the edge of the circle, her flowing hair draped over her breasts. Once the ceremony began, however, her apprehension fled; she joined hands with the others and danced without embarrassment.

Now that Paul was an accepted member of the coven he was able to join the others in bringing personal problems before the circle when they began their weekly help sessions. The standard practice is to raise a cone of power—commonly known as a familiar—which can be instructed either to look into the future and report back findings, or to influence other people, usually non-witches.

Faced with Paul's problems, the witches debated which powers to use and they finally sent out two familiars, one to persuade his ex-fiancée to halt breach-of-promise proceedings, the other to attract money and ward off writs.

The first result came almost instantaneously; the girl asked to see Paul. He took Alex as a witness and was told that she was cancelling her court action and that she never wanted to see him again. Although he was upset at her attitude—no woman had ever thrown him over before—Paul was elated at the escape. The second followed in a matter of days and was most mysterious; his bank manager wrote to say that a relative of Paul's, who wished to remain anonymous, had deposited a cheque to cover the immediate debts.

'Great!' Paul's reaction was immediate. 'Now I can get a new suit.'

Caustically Alex told him that help was given only to those in need, that if the power were abused it would turn against him. With some reluctance Paul put away ideas of feathering his nest and settled down to hard work, frugal living and the study of witchcraft. Once he stopped thinking only of himself, he developed with extraordinary speed.

Initiation brought many troubles to Maxine. Her mother

had been ill for some time and now knew that she had cancer. When she discovered that her daughter had become a witch, she demanded that she return to the Roman Catholic Church where she could offer prayers for her mother's recovery. Maxine claimed that witchcraft was the true religion and offered to prove it by letting Alex heal her with his powers.

Alex was reluctant to put his faith on trial. 'I'll gladly heal you,' he said, 'but you must forget about witchcraft. Just try to think of there being only one god who helps everyone regardless of religions.'

He asked Mrs Morris if she would be afraid if she saw a spirit. 'I don't think so.' She hesitated. 'But what would it look like?'

He explained that it would probably look like a ball of fire in perpetual motion throwing out rays of heat. Under no circumstances must she scream or move if it approached her, for the power would collapse if concentration were interrupted.

Mrs Morris sat back in her chair as she was told, the swelling in her throat accentuated by the firelight. Solemnly Alex called on his familiars, invoking them to appear and seal off the malignant cells so that the cancer might shrivel and be cured. For a few moments nothing happened; then Maxine started a little as she saw a translucent column of whirling reds and yellows leave Alex and edge over towards her mother. It appeared to come in wisps from Alex's head and shoulders, gathering colour and substance as it formed a cylindrical column. It hovered inches above the floor, extending to a height of perhaps three feet, but constantly dilating and contracting as if it were a flame fed by a large gas jet. The room grew hot and Mrs Morris's skin prickled. There was no sound as the apparition zig-zagged across the hearth, but when it was only inches away from her, terror overcame her. Putting her hands to her throat, she screamed. 'Take it away. It's burning. I'm afraid.' She broke into sobs. Maxine tried to comfort her, at the same time berating her for having destroyed her chance of being cured.

But the swelling decreased and for a few weeks it seemed as though the cure had succeeded. Then new growths began in other parts of her body. Mrs Morris would not try witchcraft again. She became increasingly bitter about her daughter's new faith and even brought priests in to exorcise her.

Maxine left secretarial college to look after her mother but there was constant friction between them and they agreed it would be best if Maxine left to live on her own. She took a flat in Didsbury and found work as a receptionist at a garage. Desperately unhappy at her mother's illness and antagonism, Maxine leaned heavily on Alex. She followed his instructions minutely and had a natural aptitude for drawing down power, creating familiars and using telepathy. Telephones became unnecessary much of the time, for instead of 'phoning to see if there was a meeting planned, she could 'tune in' and mind-read her fellow witches. In the evenings she would go to her room, put on her robes and cast a circle about her bed. Safely inside, she would bring down the power, analysing her problems and the root of her unrest. She was not surprised at the answer; she knew that she was in love with Alex despite the twenty years between them.

When she was told that he was to be her husband, Maxine could not wait for events to work themselves out, and decided to help them along. On a night when she had been to visit her mother and had had a particularly distressing scene, she went to her circle and demanded that her familiar bring Alex to her there and then, in the flesh.

Six miles away at his house in Newton Heath, Alex was just getting ready for bed when he felt impelled to hurry from the house. Paul, who was spending the night on the settee in the living-room, stopped his headlong dash. 'Where do you think you're going in your pyjamas?' he asked.

Alex pulled himself up with a jerk and concentrated on the situation. In an instant he was aware that he was being commanded by another witch. It was a simple task for his familiars to discover which one. Alarmed, he began looking for reasons

why Maxine should need him. Was she in trouble, or danger? The truth surprised him, for at no time had he given her the slightest encouragement to be anything other than a pupil. He sat down with the tarot cards to see what was going to become of her.

11 Witch Wedding

Although she was disappointed when Alex did not respond to her summons, Maxine continued to practise magic, especially mind-reading. She refused to have anything to do with the crystal after her first attempt for it had the hypnotic effect of making her feel she was about to be drawn inside it and trapped. Alex assured her that this was common to most clairvoyants and that she would overcome her fears in time, but she preferred to read the tarot cards in spite of the doleful future that appeared to be awaiting her. There was no doubt that her mother was going to die.

As Maxine and Paul had become proficient so quickly, Alex decided that their second- and third-grade initiations could be combined. They both elected to stay with Alex's coven as high priest and high priestess rather than form a new coven of their own, which they would be entitled to do. Paul still had a tendency to use his powers frivolously, but it was usually for practical and harmless reasons. If he went into a crowded restaurant, he had only to concentrate on a table for its occupants either to leave precipitously or to find they had friends at another table whom they felt impelled to join. Alex wished that he would become more responsible so that he could properly fulfil his duties as apprentice.

In between running his one hundred covens, helping seekers from all over Britain and training his witches, Alex still found time to crystal-gaze. There she stood, the witch queen he had been promised in visions he had seen in his crystal as a boy, standing arm in arm with him. It was obviously Maxine and she was wearing a wedding-ring—his.

Alex had enjoyed his freedom as a single man following his first unhappy attempt at marriage, and now he had no wish to change his way of life. His little house at Newton Heath suited him; and anyway it lacked the modern conveniences a wife would want. His flat in Chorlton was merely a *pied-à-terre* for his witch activities. Perhaps his crystal had lied? He conjured up a familiar and sent it in search of the future. Maxine, it reported, was to be his wife but not until after her mother had died later in the year, and not before she had been initiated into the third grade.

Now Alex was really alarmed; how could he initiate a virgin—and a minor at that? The only way, he decided, was to initiate her and Paul together, as brother and sister, in the way they had undergone their first-grade initiation, and thus sex would play no part.

When the day came Alex followed the exact ritual, but instead of telling the rest of the coven to leave the room, he commanded Paul to lay his body on Maxine's without passion or lust, so that she would remain a virgin but would be initiated symbolically. After the ceremony, when they sat down to the feast—known as the mass long before the advent of Christianity—Alex told her that he would be marrying her later in the year.

'But why not now?' she asked. She loved him and could see no reason for postponing the wedding.

Alex then told her of her mother's impending death which, of course, she had seen so often in the tarot cards. 'Your mother will never approve of witchcraft, and it is your duty to do the best you can to make her happy these last few months.'

As a third-grade witch Maxine was denied no knowledge

of the brotherhood or the higher magic. She found she had a special aptitude for opening locked doors—Alex always kept his flat locked when he was out but Maxine could 'wish' it open. It was a talent that might have netted her a fortune had she applied it dishonestly, but she only used it to take refuge in Alex's flat when the discord with her mother became too much for her or she wanted to avoid the people who kept trying to put her off witchcraft.

One evening, just as the coven was beginning its session, a distant relative of Mrs Morris arrived and demanded that Maxine be sent home at once. The witches retired into the kitchen to go on with their work while Alex tried to reason with the man. There was a loud argument and their voices could be heard all over the flat, so the coven decided to take the law into their own hands. In whispers, they called down the power and directed it to deflate the tyres on the man's car. When he went outside and found what had happened, he thought that someone must have crept out of the house and let them down. He pumped them up, therefore, and returned to the front door, never taking his eyes from the car; then he began to denounce witches and all they stood for. During the performance, the witches 'wished' his tyres down again. Which was the last that they heard of him. He pumped his tyres up again and drove off at full speed. He preferred to let Maxine go to the devil than risk his car in that neighbourhood again.

Maxine returned to her mother of her own free will one morning. She had awoken to see, on the bedroom wall, a sword pointing downwards, a symbol of death. It vanished almost immediately but not before she had resolved to be by her mother until her death. It came four days later, and while Maxine's little sister went to live with relatives, Maxine tried to put the family affairs in order. Her efforts were not helped by neighbours who, having heard of the girl's allegiance to witchcraft, slandered her in the street and threw bricks through her window. Newspapers printed reports of the 'persecution', and the following week Maxine was dismissed

from the garage where she worked. The manager apologized; if it had been left to him, he would have let Maxine worship as she liked, but he was being 'pressed' by some clients.

Alex knew that the time had come to make her his wife. There could be no church ceremony, their both being pagans, nor any civil ceremony, for Maxine was only nineteen and her guardians had continued her mother's fight against witchcraft and refused to give their consent to the marriage. It would have to be a handfasting, such as had not been performed in England for centuries. Maxine was ecstatic—no cathedral wedding could have thrilled her more.

The ceremony began with the couple jumping over a broomstick, then over a flaming cauldron, to ensure the fertility of the marriage. Then they had their forearms nicked with a dagger and bound together so that their blood could mingle. Normally the third-grade initiation would have been held before this, but for Maxine and Alex it was already obsolete. They spent their honeymoon in Alex's flat, surrounded by the magical weapons that were so much a part of their lives.

Now that Alex spent so much of his time with his bride, Paul was very lonely. He had taken a room in Stockport and had fallen in love with a girl, but she was engaged to someone else and he had resolved not to try to win her over. Used to a sociable life, he asked Alex to apply his powers to send him someone to live for.

For some time Alex had been toying with the idea of trying an experiment. He had studied it but never performed it, nor heard of any other living person who had. Many of the ancient magicians, however, could apparently conjure up a familiar and make it appear in the flesh, not only visible to themselves but also to other magicians present, and Alex wanted to emulate them. He put the idea to Paul. 'Let's make her a real beauty,' was his typical reaction.

Alex then had to explain that what he planned to create was a baby, the spiritual son of Paul. They would combine their powers to conceive it and give it birth, and in the spirit

world it would be able to develop its own character under their guidance.

Many of the purification rituals necessary for the three-day ceremony were identical with those of the Abra-Melin system, including the preliminary nine-day fast. The whole thing was performed in Paul's room, the attic of a Victorian house owned by a Church of England clergyman, blessedly unaware of his tenant's beliefs. The divan bed was stood on end, draped with freshly laundered sheets and positioned between Paul and Alex, one of the instructions being that they must not be able to see one another throughout the rituals. Invocations were said to the Egyptian gods Hapy, Qebehsenuf, Duamutef and Imset:

Lord Hapy, Royal Son of Horus, Earth God and Lord of the North, Keeper and Guardian of the lungs, with the casting of the sacred salt, fertilize and sanctify this sacred ground with thy being, so that we may be strong in all things.

Lord Qebehsenuf, Royal Son of Horus, Air God and Lord of the West, Keeper and Guardian of the intestines, with the disturbance of the air with this music descend from thy cardinal point, purify and sanctify the area of this holy sanctum.

Lord Duamutef, Royal Son of Horus, Fire God and Lord of the East, Keeper and Guardian of the stomach, with the burning of the ritual fire before the great Mother Isis, the all-consuming element, sanctify and purify this sanctum from all violations.

Lord Imset, Royal Son of Horus, Water God and Lord of the South, Keeper and Guardian of the liver, with the sprinkling of this sacred water sanctify and cleanse this holy sanctum of all its impurities and the vanities of men.

Clad in white robes which opened down the front, and with feet bare, they burnt Kyphi—incense—during the rites. On the third day, they prayed to the Goddess Isis, the Earth Mother:

O, Aset, dark and mighty Mother, Thou who didst free Sethan from his bondage, Thy secret is known to me, therefore bring me that which I desire.

Now behold at my command thou gatherest together the charm from every place where it is, and from every man with whom it is,

swifter than greyhounds and quicker than light, the charm which created the forms of being from the mother and which either createth the gods or maketh them to be silent, and which giveth the heat of life unto the gods.

Now both men fixed their eyes upon a silver pentacle. The curtains were closed against the winter evening; one candle only burned. Earthenware bowls of olive oil stood at each cardinal point. Imploring the four sacred names of God, Yod, He Vau and He, Alex and Paul recited the final proclamation and, at the same time, masturbated, ejecting their sperm on to the pentacle.

As they both slumped back exhausted from their long vigil, a baby's cry broke the silence. There on the pentacle, still moist with semen, lay what appeared to be a human baby of normal size except that it had no navel, nor umbilical cord, and it appeared to be bisexual, its genitals part male, part female.

Paul bent to pick it up, but Alex, following the Hebrew ritual, stopped him.

'But you said it was my son,' said Paul. 'I want to christen it.'

'How can we christen it if we aren't Christians? You can baptize it. Here, use the consecrated water, but do not touch the child with your hands.'

Paul flicked his moistened fingers over the baby and gave him the name 'Michael'. Neither of them knew what next to do with the wailing infant, and Alex tried to conjure up a familiar to help him. None would come, so he then went into a trance to see if Nick would help.

When Alex awakened, Paul was in tears and the baby gone. 'We shall never see him again,' he told Alex. 'Nick told me that we were to train Michael to be obedient in Wicca so that he could be as a son to me. But he won't stay a baby; in the spirit world he'll mature so quickly that within twenty-four hours he'll be older than I am now.'

Until now Alex had gone into a trance only when he wished, but Michael altered that. Within the space of a few days he stopped being a helpless baby and became a precocious

nuisance. He began by invading Alex's body, taking him over so completely that when Alex came to, he would find that he had insulted old friends, flirted with their wives and done all sorts of things he would not normally have dreamed of doing. Michael was not only too big for his boots, but too big for his host. Seams literally began to split after Michael manifested himself and Alex was compelled to buy a new suit several sizes too large. It hung on him in folds but the moment he was 'taken' by Michael, he filled it out.

Alex's reputation was being tarnished by the wild parties his body attended when Michael was in residence. He could understand a little better now the unfortunate victims of the ancient witch trials—for here he was possessed of a devil of his own making! In addition to his taking advantage of Alex's body at will, Michael had to be bribed to give information asked of him and for which he had been created. Alex, who has frugal tastes, would recover from an involuntary trance to find he had eaten a pound of chocolate biscuits demanded by Michael in return for information. The spirit had begun to take over, demanding the exclusive use of Alex's body, demanding to be born human.

Other familiars conjured up by the coven warned that Michael was hoarding a reservoir of power. Even the first-grade witches had noticed that of late, when they raised the cone of power in the circle, it would be whipped away and they would have to start all over again.

Finally, Alex called a meeting, cast the circle and told Paul that Michael must be destroyed. 'He is obsessing me. I have no life of my own. I can't get on with any work, as I have no defence against him.'

In front of all the high priests and high priestesses—no first-graders were allowed to witness the banishing—Alex prepared for the final act against Michael.

'Is there no other way?' Paul asked. 'Can't we give him another chance?'

Alex was adamant; it was his life or Michael's. The experiment had not been a success and it must be ended. He threw

into the cauldron in the centre of the circle the robes he and Paul had worn when creating Michael. As the flames soared, the pentacle was cast in, together with the bed-sheets, the melted wax from the candle and the pages of rituals. As each item was thrown to the flames, curses were pronounced, each more terrible than the last.

Suddenly Alex staggered, dropped his athame, and Michael's voice took over, the first time it had ever done so inside a circle.

'I am a spirit,' he screamed. 'I have stopped being what you made me, a familiar, and neither you nor all the gods can destroy me. . . .'

The voice faded. As Alex came to, he seized his athame, which is never used to destroy except in exceptional circumstances, and held it aloft, banishing the spirit by all the powers of witchcraft.

There was silence and the air quivered with tension. Then, as though from a distance, came a faint wail.

'What is it?' Alex asked, now in full possession both of himself and, he felt, of the cone of power.

'A voice,' was the reply. 'A voice in the wilderness.'

Determined to know if that was the last of Michael, Alex conjured up other familiars to enquire.

'You cannot banish him altogether,' was the reply. 'Let us take over his training so that he can become a subservient spirit and come only when called.'

Alex was reluctant, but in time the familiars were proved right. Michael became the most trusted of them all. Today he will work diligently on any task set him by Alex, Paul or even Maxine.

12 King of the Witches

In 1965 Alex received an invitation from one of the 1,623 witches then attached to his covens. A party was being held at which he would be guest of honour. He knew a special ceremony had been arranged, but he was given no details.

On arriving at the party he was led into the drawing-room where five full covens—sixty-five people—were awaiting him. Laid out over a chair were new robes of deep blue velvet which apparently had been made specially for him.

'But I don't need any new robes,' he said. He had always designed and sewn his own.

'We have been in conference with all the other covens,' one of the elders told him. 'We have come to the conclusion that since you are our founder, the only one amongst us directly descended from witches, and equipped with knowledge that outstrips ours, we want to crown you "King of the Witches" and acknowledge you formally as the foremost authority on witchcraft.'

Alex could not help being flattered by such esteem and loyalty, but he had no stomach for the extra work and responsibility that would come with the title. A pacific man by nature, he was content to pass on the teachings of the cult and try to

help those in need. Acting as arbiter in the innumerable disputes of his heterogeneous band of followers did not come to him naturally. In matters of ritual and dogma, his authority amongst his covens was unquestioned anyway—why was it necessary to appoint him king? The elder, or high priest, in each coven was usually able to sort out its difficulties; only the insoluble ones were referred to Alex. 'I'm not God,' he told them. 'I can do no more than any one of you.'

They agreed, to a point, but went on to itemize the times over the years when Alex's authority had been questioned, challenged and even cursed. When he had first begun making public appearances to explain witchcraft and its compatibility with other religions, he had received a formal epistle putting the curse of the witches upon him. It was typewritten, except for the pentacle talisman at the top and the Hebrew inscription at the bottom, and it compared him to Joris Karl Huysmans, a French writer, who, in the last century, had turned to witchcraft and developed an obsession with his powers. Later he became a devout Roman Catholic and exposed the secrets of witchcraft, mostly of the black variety, in his books. Modern witches believe he was cursed by his contemporaries for he died a lingering death of cancer of the palate. Now the curse was being passed on to Alex for daring to reveal details of the cult.

At this time, Alex was undergoing a period when his future would not declare itself in either the crystal or the tarot cards. At the bottom of the epistle was a full set of tarot cards drawn in detail, with their interpretation. Some of the events prophesied at the time the letter was drawn up had indeed happened; they could not possibly have been known by even his own witches, let alone outside ones. There was no doubt that the letter was in deadly earnest and that its originators were experienced witches. Their only omission from the traditional words of the curse, usually inscribed about the pentacle, was the phrase: 'Set thou a wicked one to be ruler over him. Let Satan stand at his right hand.'

That night Alex had addressed the coven meeting and,

to the surprise of those present, had passed round the eighteen-inch-long curse. Afterwards he was invited to speak on a television programme and the interviewer asked him what he thought of the curse. Snapping his fingers, Alex replied, 'Let them do their worst; this is what I think of the curse.'

Brave words, but when he later returned to his flat with Maxine he could feel the evil about them. The darkness seemed to reach out for him. For days he purified it with incense and called down the powers with invocations and incantations. Only his enormous confidence in his ability to banish the curse and protect his wife and his covens prevented the rise of panic among his followers.

Eventually the curse was banished and no one ever doubted Alex's mastery of witchcraft again. It was plain that he was innocent of revealing the innermost secrets of the brotherhood and had no intention of following Huysmans. The witches of his covens realized that *their* leader was not going to succumb to cancer.

In the end Alex was persuaded to be their king. He put on the new robes. In a ceremony made up partly of rites for the crowning of Egyptian Pharaohs, partly of witch rituals, the elders placed a crown of copper, brass with a little silver, and blue velvet upon his head. They anointed his bare feet with oil and sat him on the throne before the altar as representative of their horned god. Afterwards they cast the crown into the cauldron of fire so that the oaths of allegiance they had taken would be binding for all time, otherwise they, too, would return to dust like the crown.

Kingship brought Alex problems greater than any he had had before. While preparing for the Hallowe'en celebrations, he received a letter from Bangalore in India. The writer, describing himself as a 'priest of Kali', said he had read a letter which Alex had written to an occult magazine, defending witchcraft and claiming that its undisputed powers were much in use today.

'I shall be coming to England in the near future,' the priest

of Kali continued, 'and I should very much like to make your acquaintance. Would you do me the honour of dining with me so that we may discuss something which, I am sure, will be dear to the hearts of both of us?'

Alex wrote back agreeing to meet him, but forgot all about it after he had looked up details of Kali worship. One of the goddesses of Hinduism, she represented destruction. Her image was an enormous black-skinned woman with a large blood-red tongue from under which projected fierce tusks. She was garlanded with a necklace of human skulls. Modern Hindus disapprove of the ancient rites of worship which, in some parts of India, are still performed and in which live animals are sacrificed. The more Alex read, the less he liked the sound of the cult, but he tried to keep his mind open: perhaps, like witchcraft, the worship of Kali had been misrepresented.

A month or so later, at the beginning of December, another letter arrived, this time from London. The priest of Kali enclosed a bank note to cover Alex's fare up to town where a hotel room had been booked for him. Please would he come for two or three days to meet his correspondent and the two friends he had with him?

The following Monday Alex went to London and checked into the hotel in the West End where his Indian hosts were staying. Dressed in dark lounge suits, they could have been businessmen. Two, Mr C. and Mr R., were in their middle fifties, while the third, Mr G., who had initiated the correspondence, was perhaps thirty-five. He appeared to be the spokesman of the group.

It was early afternoon when they met and over tea they talked generally about religions of the world, keeping the discussion impersonal. All were educated and spoke excellent English. Whenever Alex tried to bring the conversation round to the worship of Kali, his remarks were skilfully turned aside and his questions lost in a welter of words. Resigning himself to the Asiatics' love of circumlocution, he sat back and let them direct the drift.

During dinner nothing serious was discussed but the moment they had finished their coffee and were sipping liqueurs in the hotel lounge, the small talk ceased. Alex knew they wanted something of him, otherwise they would not have gone to the expense of inviting him down. It had become obvious from the conversation that the sole purpose of their visit to England was to meet him. He felt flattered, and a little afraid.

'Are we to understand that you are directly descended from a line of witches dating back to the Middle Ages?' asked Mr G.

Alex confirmed that he was.

'And that you are the acknowledged master of witchcraft in Europe?'

Alex explained that he believed so, although he had not had much contact with covens in France and Belgium.

'But is there anyone more experienced in witchcraft and its magic than you?' Mr G. was insistent.

Alex replied that if there were such a person, he had not met him or even heard of him. 'Why are the priests of Kali so interested in witchcraft? Are you seeking initiation?'

The man smiled and assured him that they were entirely satisfied with their own religion and had no wish to become witches. 'But we do have need of you,' he went on. 'Let me explain; Kali is the ancient goddess of destruction who lends us her powers to do our will so long as we worship her in the way she prefers. During one of our pilgrimages to old shrines, we came upon a ruined temple erected to the goddess many generations ago and later desecrated by modern adherents of Hinduism who have taken much of the old ritual out of the religion and have chosen to neglect Kali.'

Alex nodded; this fitted in with what he had read. 'But what has all this to do with me?' he asked.

The three men exchanged glances. Then Mr G. continued, 'For several years, followers of our sect have been donating funds for the restoration of this temple. Now it is ready to be dedicated and we have decided that you are the person best fitted to do this.'

Before Alex could speak, the Indian hurried on. 'We have come prepared to pay you £1,000 now and we will give you a second thousand after the ceremony. In addition we shall pay your air fare and all your expenses while you are in India.' He sat back and smiled while his colleagues nodded agreement.

'What sort of ceremony had you in mind?' Alex asked.

'Why, the usual mystic rites to dedicate a temple.' Mr G. held his hands palm upwards, expressing his surprise at the question.

The hairs on the back of Alex's neck began to bristle. 'Human sacrifice?' he asked.

'But of course.'

The soft-footed waiter replaced their glasses with full ones. All round the room small groups exchanged small talk while the three smiling Indians calmly planned a ritual murder which they expected Alex to perform for money.

They swept away his protests with the assurance that the victim, who had already been chosen, was one of their adherents and was quite willing to offer her life on the altar of Kali.

'She is honoured at being chosen,' Mr G. said. 'We have told her that she will be rewarded by the goddess with everlasting life at her right hand. In addition her family are to be recompensed for her death. She is looking forward to meeting you.'

Alex could not conceal a look of horror.

'It will not be a disagreeable operation,' Mr G. assured him. 'The girl will be drugged: she won't struggle or interrupt the ritual, and you need not dismember her, as I understand your own brotherhood does. Oh no'—he smiled gently—'you shall merely disembowel her in order to let the still warm blood flow over the altar and transfer its life force to the power we shall raise to guard the temple.'

Interpreting Alex's stunned silence to mean consent, Mr G. hastened to add that as witchcraft, unbroken down the centuries, had developed so much power, Alex would be asked to remain in India for a period of six months so that he

could instruct the priests in the European ways of raising the cones of power and setting them to work. And because the new temple must have the very best equipment, they were prepared to allot a large sum of money to purchase real witches' knives, swords and other magic weapons which Alex could engrave, dedicate and hand over to the temple after the ceremony.

Recovering his composure, Alex set them right about witchcraft. 'It is centuries since sacrifice was countenanced by our gods,' he told the disbelieving priests. 'In olden days people were brutalized by their environment, but now all our powers are dedicated to good. Our gods and goddesses demand that there shall be no sacrifice of either animal or human life. Surely your Kali is no different?'

The conversation assumed a nightmare quality as the three Indians, with smiles never leaving their faces, shrugged off Alex's refusal and insisted that they had chosen him and that he could not refuse the honour.

'If you must have a life force sacrificed on the altar,' Alex argued, 'why not use new-laid eggs? This has been done in Europe with excellent results—'

'Perhaps,' Mr R. interrupted delicately, 'perhaps you might be persuaded if we were to increase the fee by, say, five hundred pounds?'

Alex assured him that it was not a question of money. He could marvel at his own honesty, for here was an opportunity to gain wealth such as he had not seen since he ended his practice of black magic. And he happened to be sorely pressed for money. He had less than ten shillings in his pocket and could not possibly have paid for even a round of drinks.

No matter how hard he tried, however, he could not convince the priests of Kali that he would never agree to their offer. When he became angry they looked hurt and shook their heads sadly at his lack of consideration.

'Many of our followers are quite poor people,' Mr G. said. 'They have put their trust in us to supply them with a new temple to which they can bring their problems, safe in the

knowledge that Kali will help them in return for all they have done. Would you deny them help and prosperity because you have, let us say, grown squeamish? We have read detailed accounts of British witchcraft, of potions compounded of baby's blood and fat. . . . Other members of your brotherhood must have fewer inhibitions than you.' A hardness came into his voice. 'Perhaps you reserve your sacrifices for your own countrymen and would deny them to us?'

Alex went into detail explaining how modern witchcraft had evolved using symbolism instead of ritual murder. Without giving away secrets, he assured them that the powers he could raise were everything anyone could wish for, and that the gods must be satisfied else they would refuse to manifest themselves. When they had calmed down somewhat, he decided to make his escape before the lounge became deserted and he was at their mercy. Even his familiars, he felt, could not protect him for long against three men of such evil intent. He rose and bade them goodnight.

'We shall breakfast with you,' they told him. 'Perhaps you will have changed your mind by morning.' Not committing himself, Alex went upstairs to his room.

Long before dawn he packed his overnight bag and left the hotel, informing the desk clerk that he had been called away. There was an awkward moment over the bill but the clerk finally found a note in his ledger that the room was to be charged to the Indian party.

For nearly two hours Alex walked the deserted streets of London before going to the station to catch the first train to Manchester. He was afraid of waiting at the station in case his hosts discovered his absence and came looking for him.

Once home he breathed easily again. But his composure was short-lived. The next morning he received a telegram from Mr G. Direct to the point of rudeness, it read, 'Come at once or action will be taken.'

Alex wasted no time. He wrote a letter telling the three men to leave England within a week. They must return to their homeland otherwise he would curse them ritually and,

even though he would spill no blood, his curses would be none the less effective.

That was on Wednesday. The following Saturday he received a letter from Mr G. saying that Mr R. had died of pneumonia after a lightning illness lasting only twelve hours. He was to be cremated at Golders Green and his companions had to stay over to attend. Even though they must have believed that Alex's curse had caught up with their friend, they did not give up hope; a footnote declared that Alex could name his own fee if he changed his mind.

In fact Alex had never pronounced his curse. He assumed that the man either had died of natural causes, or had perhaps approached some other witch who had cursed him without warning. In any case Alex never heard from the priests of Kali again.

13 Toil and Trouble

As well as visiting his own covens, scattered the length and breadth of the country, Alex occasionally went to see those of other witches, for a copy of the *Book of Shadows*, with its appendix listing witches and their addresses, acts as an 'Open, Sesame' to members everywhere. Not all the 'outsiders' recognized Alex as the King of the Witches, but they extended a welcome and often took the opportunity of comparing rituals which differ in degree from coven to coven.

One week-end Alex and two other men of his group travelled some distance to meet a pair of witches, husband and wife. They had given no advance notice of their visit and when they arrived, Alex noticed that the wife kept them in the study while her husband was obviously moving things out of sight. Alex was pleased at the manner in which they were guarding their secrets from strangers, but when he let fall two or three items of witch code which ought to have been seized upon by anyone familiar with the standard code, the remarks passed unnoticed.

Alex exchanged glances with his companions. When they were finally shown into the ritual room, he knew at once that all was not as it should be. There was no scourge upon

the altar, for instance. That could mean only one thing: it was not being used merely as a symbolic weapon. Two or three other details were either omitted or substituted, and Alex decided he would stay no longer.

'Surely you've got time for a drink,' said the woman.

Alex refused, but the younger of his two companions, a newly initiated witch of eighteen, accepted, telling Alex he would see him at the hotel later.

Filled with foreboding, Alex walked round the town, returning to the hotel at frequent intervals to see if his friend had returned. By two o'clock in the morning he could wait no longer. He went to the witches' house and knocked on the door until a light appeared on the landing upstairs. 'Go away,' a man's voice called out.

'Open the door or I'll fetch the police,' replied Alex. He knew with certainty what had been happening inside. His rage was such that he did not have the necessary self-control to conjure up his familiars, but he felt no need of them. After he had banged on the door again, it was opened. He pushed past the man and raced up the stairs. He looked into each room until he found his friend. He was naked, his chest, abdomen and thighs patterned with huge angry weals and scratches. His head lolled on one side and Alex noticed that the pupils of his eyes were dilated. He had been drugged, whipped and seduced.

There was nothing Alex could do but tell the man that he must see the young witch back to his hotel by nine o'clock the next morning, failing which the police would be informed. The woman smiled slightly, but her husband was willing to agree to anything so long as Alex would leave.

There was little sleep for Alex that night as he tried to work spells to counteract the evil that had enveloped his friend. But his magic was overpowered by the black magic emanating from the couple and helped by the willingness of their victim. Shortly before nine the next morning, however, the young man arrived at the hotel sober, his injuries hidden by his clothes.

Alex explained to him what he had got himself mixed up with, and then said, 'I don't usually order my witches around, but I am ordering you now to pack your bag and come home with us. If you don't, we shall put the curse of the brotherhood on you and banish you from every coven in the country.'

The young witch refused. 'I am staying here with my friends,' was all he would say, and Alex had to go home without him. At the next coven meeting, he had the unenviable task of uttering the witches' curse, which lasts for a year and a day but which can be rescinded during that time if the excommunicant asks for forgiveness and readmission.

Alex knew, however, that there would be no turning back for his young friend, no seeking of forgiveness; he had taken the path to perversion and there was nothing Alex could do about it. Black magic can only be overcome by white when the victim co-operates and is not in league with his tormentors.

But the bitterest blow had yet to fall. At a party one evening a young girl asked Alex to prove that he was a witch.

'I don't have to prove it,' Alex replied. Then, seeing her crestfallen face, he added, 'But I can tell you that you are going through an unpleasant time now, living at your grandmother's home. Your parents are shirking their responsibilities, especially as you are only seventeen.'

The girl was amazed and asked how he knew.

'Because I'm a witch.' He grinned. 'What is more, you have a boy friend who takes you too much for granted.' They chatted until the girl had to go, and Maxine, who felt sorry for her, gave her their address and told her to get in touch with them if she needed help or advice.

Some while later the girl came and asked for advice. Alex introduced her to Paul and the three of them sat down while the tarot cards were shuffled and set out. Alex felt no reluctance in letting Paul listen to the girl's confidences. They were both there in the capacity of priests—or doctors—and as such were bound to respect her confidence and not take advantage of it. The cards showed that she was considering

giving up her boy friend, but Alex told her that if she could put up with the lack of harmony for a few weeks, they would be able to settle down, get married and live a happy life.

'If you break with your young man, you will meet two other men very soon, one young and the other older.' Alex manipulated the cards horizontally, vertically and then diagonally, not liking what he saw. 'You will spoil your life if you are not careful. You will go and live with the young man and you will be very unhappy. You will have two children and the man will leave you.'

The girl smiled at his warnings; they seemed so remote from the people she knew.

It was some weeks before Maxine drew Alex's attention to the change that had come over Paul. No longer a gregarious, amusing companion, he would become secretive and aggressive if questioned about his activities. He began being late for meetings and, as some members travelled quite a distance to the covenstead and had to leave promptly afterwards, Alex took him to task.

'As a priest you have a duty to the community,' he said. 'If you want to miss a meeting, be man enough to say so and we'll get someone else to officiate, but don't treat your brothers lightly.'

Paul was truculent, but for a time he became more reliable. Then one evening he called on Alex and asked him if he would read the tarot cards for him; he had always had a blind spot for his own future.

As the deck was spread upon the floor, Alex could scarcely believe what he saw. 'You are having an affair with the girl who asked us for help!' he exclaimed. 'You have deliberately taken the path I told her to avoid, and you are the one who has led her on to it.'

Paul brushed aside the cards and tried to bluff it out.

'You can deny me, but you can't deny Wicca,' Alex retorted. 'Don't deny your faith, if you have any decency left at all.'

Alex called a council of second- and third-grade witches to

decide what should be done. A purification bath of cold water and salt was prepared and Paul was told to immerse himself while the council cast the circle and heard what Alex had to say. They had consulted the books on witch law, had found the specific ones that Paul had broken, and had copied them out. Now the culprit was called in. He was led to the throne beside the altar and, when he was seated, the charges were read out to him. He was asked to search his soul, his mind and his heart before he answered. Three times he was asked to reply to the charges, and when he remained silent, his guilt was accepted. He was to be banished, but not for the year and a day applicable to first- and second-grade witches. For him, as a high priest and third-grader, it would be for ever, in this life and any that might follow.

Sick at heart, Alex scourged Paul the requisite forty times, not hard enough to leave weals or draw blood, but sufficient to bruise. And still Paul kept silent. He was dismissed from the circle and his name was removed from the *Book of Shadows*.

For some time Alex had been considering leaving his Manchester covens under the stewardship of Paul while he and Maxine moved to London where there were many young people wanting to be initiated. Now that he had lost his apprentice he had to reconsider the matter, and before he finally made up his mind, two things happened.

The first was brought to his notice by one of his witches who had seen an advertisement in the agony column of a Manchester newspaper. 'Contact with a witch urgently needed. Please help,' it read. Alex wrote and received a reply from Mrs Kate Peters who agreed to visit him the next day.

She was a huge Jamaican, clad in a flowered dress and a cartwheel hat overflowing with life-sized apples and oranges. Her mournful expression did not match her exuberant appearance. 'Dear Lord, you must help me,' she wailed, seizing Alex's hands and almost crushing them as he led her into the small living-room of his Newton Heath house.

In between appeals to Jesus to confirm the truth of her

statements, she told him of her troubles. A year earlier she had let one of her rooms to an Irishman, Paddy. He had been a good lodger until he had become unemployed, whereupon he could no longer pay his rent. She had let him live rent free for a while and had given him the occasional meal and pennies for his gas meter.

When she returned from shopping one day, she heard him tampering with his gas meter. She burst open the door and found him scooping a pile of pennies from the floor. Alex could imagine the man cowering in the face of her rage as she threatened to call the police and have him sent to gaol unless he packed his belongings and left at once. She stormed out and went to work off her temper in the kitchen.

Some hours later she remembered the cause of her anger and she went to see if he had, in fact, left. His door was locked and there was a strong smell of gas. She ran to turn off the gas-main tap, then into the street to fetch a policeman. It was no use: Paddy was dead, his discoloured face buried in the pile of pennies.

Seizing Alex's hands again, Mrs Peters rolled her eyes and declared that in that instant she had felt the pennies leave the floor and fly into her head. Now, whenever she moved, she could feel them jangling inside. For one second Alex felt hysterical laughter rising within him. As a child he had had a little money box in the form of a coloured man's head. An outstretched hand was attached to a lever at the back, and when a penny was put into it and the lever was depressed, the hand came up to the open mouth and tipped the penny down the throat. He remembered how often he had tried to rifle it by sticking a knife between its teeth and shaking it upside down.

Besides having pennies rattling in her head, Mrs Peters could get no peace at home for the spirit of Paddy banging round the house. She had been searching for months for a Jamaican 'shepherd man' or voodoo priest to rid her of the evil spirits; in despair she had advertised for a witch.

'Please help me,' she cried. 'The Lord will bless you if you do.'

Alex told her to take hold of herself; he was convinced that she had an outsized guilt complex about her lodger, and that a bit of psychology would send her home happy.

'You were greedy, wanting those pennies when you saw them lying idle round the dead man's head, weren't you?' he asked.

'Oh yes, master, if you say so. I was greedy.' She rocked backwards and forwards.

'Very well,' he said sternly, gathering together a few of his witch weapons and regalia, and drawing a circle around her. 'I'll work my witchcraft now to clear your head, and tomorrow I shall come to exorcize your house.'

While he chanted incantations he was disturbed, and amused, to hear her chiming in with whole passages from the Psalms.

At the culmination of his ceremony he pointed to the now silent woman whose eyes were tightly shut, and told the money to depart. There was a moment's pause, then the air was filled with the foulest language Alex had ever heard, all in a strong Irish accent. Alex had thought that he was dealing with an imaginative self-deluded woman, but now he realized that she was genuinely possessed. He abandoned his parody of a witch-ceremony and began working in earnest. He must conjure up power to combat the evil influence that was speaking through the entranced woman.

Gradually the tension eased and the voice died away. Mrs Peters opened her eyes in surprise. 'Have I been asleep?'

Alex assured her that everything was all right, and he gathered together his regalia and offered to escort her home so that he could exorcise her house without delay.

All was quiet as they entered the house, and Alex went from room to room sprinkling water and reciting his incantations while Mrs Peters quoted the gospel.

'You will be all right now,' he told her. But she was not convinced. 'Stay for a meal,' she urged. 'It always starts up after tea.'

It began like a distant knocking. 'Run the tap,' Alex advised. He had noticed the hot-water pipes skirting the

kitchen and thought there might be air in them. For a few moments the knocking stopped and he believed he had found the trouble. Then it began in earnest. Walls rumbled as though being kicked, window-panes rattled although there was no wind, and the brass ornaments on the mantelpiece rocked and shook. Boldly Alex raised his fist and demanded that the spirits go or be destroyed by incense and curses. From room to room he ran, chasing the invisible spectre, encouraged by Mrs Peters who charged behind him crying 'Hallelujah!'

But the noises continued. 'Your magic isn't enough without voodoo,' Mrs Peters concluded. 'I know the things you need. You come back here tomorrow night at nine o'clock and me and my friends, we shall show you.'

Puzzled at his failure, Alex was glad to get away from the unruly poltergeist. He spent the evening looking through his witch books to see if there was anything he had omitted to do.

The next night he presented himself at the appointed hour. Mrs Peters showed him into the kitchen where a crowd of fifteen or twenty Jamaicans were awaiting him. On the table was a sack of cement, a wreath of garlic, four huge iron spikes each attached to a length of heavy chain, and a dagger. Tied to the table leg was a small goat bleating as if in anticipation of its death.

'Oh, no,' Alex said when the dagger was offered to him, 'I don't make sacrifices. It's not necessary nowadays. . . .' His words were drowned by rumbles of anger. Mrs Peters leapt in to appease her friends while Alex tried to explain his point of view.

A small, wizened Jamaican in one corner voiced the majority opinion. 'Are white witches too high and mighty to help their coloured brethren?'

Vainly Alex tried to win their approval and, grudgingly, they agreed to tell him how the voodoo ceremony should be conducted. The goat must be killed so that its blood splashed the walls and all the people within them. Then the iron spikes

had to be taken to the cemetery where the Irishman was buried and one spike embedded in cement at each corner of the grave to bind the spirit. Lastly the wreath of garlic must be placed on top of the grave to prevent its escaping.

Again Alex was handed the dagger, and again he refused to take it. Without further ado, a tall Jamaican snatched it and drew it across the goat's throat. It bleated momentarily; blood spurted in all directions and the little creature staggered and collapsed. Someone pushed it away with his foot; it had served its purpose. Alex had no idea that so small a creature could hold so much blood; it oozed everywhere, filling the air with a sweet hot smell.

Alex realized that the company was enjoying his discomfort. Feeling was running high and, as the men smeared the blood on to their wrists, he was really afraid.

'It was not necessary to make a blood sacrifice,' he shouted, trying to dominate the gathering. 'I have already worked a spell and your ghost has gone.'

As if to mock his words, the walls began to knock and the windows shook louder than ever. The men got up from their chairs and crowded towards the centre of the room. Alex edged towards the door, more afraid of the living than the dead.

'I am going to fetch some more herbs,' he told them. Then he opened the door and fled, not stopping until he reached the main road and found a taxi to take him to safety.

Thoroughly ashamed of his retreat—and his defeat—Alex was to hear some months later that someone, somehow, had exorcized the rampageous poltergeist.

The event that was to precipitate his move to London came a few days later when Maxine announced that she was pregnant. Everything was against their staying in Manchester: the house was too small for three, the flat unsuitable and, above all, Maxine insisted that no trace of Alex's black-magic period should ever taint the child. He must forgo the small allowance he had received from Ron ever since leaving the Rylands Library.

14 Betrayal in the Coven

Before Alex had time to bring himself opportunities through magic, friends who heard he was planning to move rallied round with offers. One, a Greek, had a compatriot who owned several apartment houses in London. The manageress of one had left, and if Maxine cared to replace her, they could have a self-contained flat and an income sufficient to keep them both. Maxine's own inheritance from her parents is in trust until 1972 when she will be twenty-five.

Before he left Manchester, Alex visited his benefactor and told him that he could no longer accept his allowance. Maud had recently died and Ron was all alone; he did not want to lose touch with Alex and he was amused more than annoyed at the suggestion that the money might be tainted.

'Tainted or not, there's £137,000 in the bank in your name, the proceeds from Riversdale and the other assets that were yours,' he said. 'I'll pay the allowance into the account and if you are squeamish about using it, your children may not be.' They parted good friends and were to remain so in the future.

Then Alex went to see his mother. She had read of his activities in the newspapers and seen him talking about

witchcraft on television; and, of course, he had visited her regularly with and without Maxine. But she had not taken his religion seriously. Now he told her the secrets of his childhood and of his initiation by his grandmother. His mother had to believe him when he explained about the regalia the old lady had left and the stories of the past she had told him. A practising Christian, Mrs Sanders was deeply shocked at her son's paganism and it was some months before she could bring herself to accept it, helped perhaps by her son's obvious happiness in his new marriage and the unquestioned good he was doing in healing the sick. Nevertheless, she asked her church for a palm cross which she put over her dead mother's photograph to ward off evil spirits.

Alex and Maxine went to live in Clanricarde Gardens near Notting Hill Gate in June 1967, but first they went through a civil marriage ceremony at the Kensington and Chelsea Registrar's Office. Both had agreed at the time of their witch wedding that they would not let the stigma of illegitimacy fall on their children. No sooner had they moved into their basement flat than they were besieged with enquiries for information and training in witchcraft. Many of the petitioners had some knowledge of the cult and it was from these that witches were initiated to form the first of many covens.

Practising witchcraft in London had its difficulties, however. All meetings had to be held indoors and only in rooms large enough to contain the circle and the altar. Besides, many of the applicants enjoyed the excitement of calling down the power and peering into the future, but were not prepared to perform the routine work of learning the rituals by heart and working for the good of others. At first Alex wasted considerable time and energy trying to teach unsuitable pupils; later he decided to hold preliminary lectures at his flat every Tuesday night when he could explain the duties required of witches and also select those whom he thought might stay the course.

The witchcraft practised in the flat was often of service to others in the building. When the owner complained of

being unable to evict two undesirable tenants without going to court, Alex set to work. His coven combined their powers and within a month the tenants had given notice to quit. When they left, witches initiated by Alex took their rooms.

During the months of her pregnancy and before, Maxine had often seen in the cards that she was going to have a witch-son who would be called Michael. Alex confirmed that he had seen the boy in his crystal and he looked forward to his appearance in the flesh. At the ante-natal clinic of the hospital where the baby was to be delivered, Maxine disconcerted the Sister when she gave her religion as 'Wicca'.

'Don't you mean Church of England?' the sister asked. It was with great reluctance that she finally wrote 'Pagan'.

On 3 December 1967 Maxine's baby was born. As she lay in the delivery room, relieved that it was over, she asked if she could hold her son. 'It's a beautiful little girl,' she was told. Maxine was certain there had been some mistake, but one look at the infant assured her that it was hers. Instead of Michael, it was called Maya—a witch name meaning 'Mother Goddess'. Maya is not being trained for witchcraft, as her brother will be when he arrives, but will be able to choose her religion for herself when she is older. Right from birth she has attended the coven meetings, but though her crib is in the same room, it is placed outside the circle.

When Maya was a few months old, Alex had a disturbing vision: a house, similar to the one in which he was living, was being destroyed by fire. People were screaming, and he could see the symbol of death. When he had had the same vision three times he called on the owner of the house and asked if he would undertake an inspection of the electrical wiring. 'The fire will be caused by a fault in the circuit,' Alex explained, but the man was sceptical and nothing was done. Alex and Maxine began to dread going to bed, for the vision indicated that the fire would occur in the night.

Six weeks after he had given his warning, Alex heard that a house almost identical to the one in which he was living, and owned by the same man, had been gutted by fire. Five people

had died. Alex blamed himself for not having gone to the police and told them of his presentiment, but Maxine insisted that they would never have acted on such flimsy evidence.

The London covens attracted their share of misfits; youngsters who had left home only to find there was no fortune awaiting them in the capital; social outcasts of one sort or another; and many who were just lonely. As he extended his area of lectures and public appearances to include universities, specialist clubs and high-intelligence groups, Alex recruited many who had natural gifts similar to those enjoyed by some hereditary witches. One of these nearly succeeded in wrecking the coven.

Ben had come from Mauritius to study at London University, but he had become a successful singer and had exchanged the academic life for the student world of pop. A Roman Catholic, he first heard Alex speak at a college lecture and asked if he could attend the Tuesday-evening sessions. Within a few months he had prepared himself for initiation and had learnt all the rituals by heart. Alex had no hesitation in putting him through the first grade.

Also in the coven was Victoria, a quiet girl of nineteen. She was engaged to a man in Edinburgh who was unaware of her religion. She asked Alex if he would consecrate her engagement ring to ensure that she would have a happy marriage, and he had obliged. While the coven prayed, he had held the ring over the altar and had blessed it witch-wise.

In between the regular weekly esbats, the witches were encouraged to hold their own informal meetings to discuss witchcraft and ways of working it. Alex knew that Ben, who had come to live in the house in Clanricarde Gardens, was holding meetings almost every night in his room, and he was pleased at such diligence and enthusiasm. He began to have second thoughts, however, when some of his witches started to question his rituals. He was not suspicious at first, merely annoyed that novices should presume to know more than he.

It was Maxine who noticed that Victoria was not wearing

her engagement ring and that she no longer spoke of her fiancé. Alex asked her what had happened and after some evasion she said that Ben had offered to consecrate the ring with magic stronger than Alex's. He had not returned her ring but it didn't matter because she was beginning to think her fiancé was the wrong man for her anyway. When Maxine set out the tarot cards, she read that Ben, instead of consecrating the ring to bless the marriage, had been working voodoo to break it up, his intention being to have an affair with Victoria.

Without waiting to hear more, Alex went up to Ben's room and demanded the return of the ring. It was concealed in a bag of flour—flour being the medium for voodoo—along with a crucifix, a St Christopher medallion and a bracelet, all belonging to other witches in the coven. On 3 January, the first full moon of 1969, the coven was convened and Ben was ritually cursed and banished. The others were asked to repeat their witch oaths or resign their membership. Voodoo is totally incompatible with witchcraft, used as it is for the seduction of women or the destruction of men by death or insanity.

'Let all of you understand that while I am elder of the coven I will tolerate no betrayal of witch ideals,' Alex told them, 'If anyone here has any doubts about his allegiance, let him speak now or the curse of the brotherhood will fall on him when he defects in the future.'

One member decided to leave. Afraid of witchcraft, but even more afraid of the voodoo he had embraced in the previous weeks, he chose to heed Alex's threat. The rest of the members embarked on purification rituals to rid themselves of the taint of voodoo. All the weapons and possessions that had been used in the alien ceremonies had to be reconsecrated, and as soon as Ben had left his room the whole coven moved in to combine their powers to exorcize his influence.

In spite of his pledge not to use magic to bring himself money, or to touch the account that Ron had opened in his name, Alex believes that he will never again be poor. The income derived from lectures, public appearances and broad-

casts, together with that submitted by petitioners needing help, is accumulating and will be used to establish a witch centre where members from all over the country—all over the world, in fact—can meet to exchange information and worship their god. The work which Alex set out to do is bearing fruit; the cult is no longer an object of scorn or ridicule and although the various covens outside his jurisdiction still dispute each other's rituals, they may be able to compromise when they have the opportunity of discussing the details openly with more experienced witches.

Alex regards his present residence in London as a prelude to the real work he will begin once he finds a suitable site for the witch centre. It will be in the country where outdoor rituals can be practised without fear of alarming neighbours. Meanwhile he is consolidating the progress witchcraft has made this decade. Each year more and more responsible people—many of them middle-aged—join his ranks. As traditional religion wanes and people seek a substitute, many are attracted to the 'back-to-nature' aspects of witchcraft. The simple worship of love and fertility can be immensely appealing in a materialistic age overshadowed by the achievements—and horrors—of science. Similarly the upsurge of interest in psychic phenomena—be they flying saucers or ESP—is conducive to the revival of witchcraft.

Man wants to believe in something. Alex hopes to direct his belief to the old religion which, he maintains, can become a real power to benefit all mankind.

An Interview with Alex Sanders

In his large basement flat in Clanricarde Gardens, Alex is surrounded by the regalia of witchcraft. On a chest stands his crystal mounted in a wooden stand. The swords used by him and Maxine occupy one corner and his library of books on magic and the occult fill three long shelves. A ball of plasticine that might, tomorrow, be used to make a fifth-fath, is now a plaything for his little daughter.

Alex is barely five feet seven inches tall. To one who has not seen him clad only in a loin-cloth, conducting a midwinter esbat with the frost forming round his bare feet, he might appear excessively frail. Indoors he wears polo-necked sweaters and feels the cold, but during witch rites he seems impervious to the elements.

His voice in normal conversation is low and lacking in resonance. Outdoors it commands attention without its being raised. His eyes are expressive; normally gentle, they can become his dominant feature when he is engaged in mystic rituals.

A constant stream of visitors—mostly witches or those seeking initiation—interrupt the interview. They are invited

to sit and listen. Occasionally Alex breaks off to go into greater detail for their benefit.

Intelligent, patient, easy-going—except in the face of dishonesty, when his temper becomes violent—he speaks his mind in soft Lancashire accents, making no concession to the double-talk of polite conversation.

Question: How many practising witches are there in Britain today?

Answer: About four thousand, but they are increasing monthly.

Q: How many hereditary witches are there besides yourself?

A: Five that I know of. Two in Scotland, others in Lancashire, Sussex and Cornwall.

Q: What does it cost to join?

A: Nothing. Witches are not allowed to receive money for membership. Those who can afford to, buy their own robes and weapons; others make do with those discarded by the coven.

Q: Is witchcraft compatible with Christianity and other religions?

A: Yes, so long as Christians recognize that their God is also ours.

Q: How much time must members devote to the cult?

A: A minimum of one evening a week plus the night of the full moon each month. Experience has shown that most witches enjoy the company of their fellows and make friends within the coven. Quite a few marry each other.

Q: Is there any age limit?

A: No, but I prefer not to initiate those under eighteen. In the upper age groups we have many in their sixties.

Q: What is the average age of your covens?

A: At present about twenty-eight, but it varies between twenty-four and thirty-two.

Q: With what intentions are most 'spells' worked?

A: Over 50 per cent of our work is in healing.

Q: How does witch-healing differ from faith-healing?

A: In faith-healing it is the faith of the patient that helps him; in witchcraft he need not know we are working for him. It is our faith and not his that is in operation.

Q: What successes have you had?

A: Too many to recount. Recently a heroin addict referred to us has been sufficiently cured to take up a place at Birmingham University. We have cured hundreds of cases of rheumatism, chest complaints, gout and nervous disorders.

Q: Are witch medicines ever used?

A: Yes, for abortions on rare occasions and for simple ailments.

Q: In what circumstances would an abortion be carried out?

A: If a witch were unmarried, or married but in poor health, or unable to cope with another child, she would be eligible. In some cases the girl friend of a witch—even if she were an unbeliever—might be helped.

Q: How is the abortion performed?

A: By a herbal medicine. It is available without prescription but only two other witches, to my knowledge, have the formula. It must be used before the third month of pregnancy.

Q: What about the potions mentioned in the old trials of witches?

A: You must remember that the vivid imaginations of the accusers compiled many. But we used to use an ointment made of aconite, Deadly Nightshade or belladonna, and bats' blood. This, smeared on our bodies, gave an illusion of warmth. But that was centuries ago. The blood would have been harmless, but the other two, if rubbed into broken skin, could cause mild poisoning which might produce excitement and possibly delirium. In those days few people were free of lice and the resultant bites, and it could explain why witches often fancied they had flown on their broomsticks.

Q: What other uses, besides healing, is witchcraft put to?

A: Looking into the future (often for the benefit of non-witches); discovering new methods, materials and machines

for industrial and commercial purposes, though I generally discourage this as too allied to black witchcraft; bringing opportunities of success or money to deserving petitioners; and finding runaway husbands and wives.

Q: Are any requests refused?

A: Many. There was a man who sent us a five-shilling postal order with a request for us to 'wish' him enough money to start a turkey farm with twenty thousand birds. We returned his money and told him to try working. As a rule we use witchcraft only when we feel sure that the applicant has tried every other means.

Q: Do businessmen ask for your help?

A: Frequently. Some stay with us, consulting us before every contract is signed and every major decision is made.

Q: Do they have to pay for help?

A: Only if they want to; we never ask for money.

Q: You say that industrial spying borders on black witchcraft. What is the difference between black witchcraft and white?

A: White is used for the good of the petitioner and must not harm even his enemies. Black involves harm being done to either the petitioner or his enemies, or the sexual seduction of women.

Q: But doesn't the use of the fifth-fath harm enemies?

A: No, it is only a means of silencing or restraining someone. Suppose we are asked to restrain a meddlesome mother-in-law. We fashion a doll in wax or plasticine, fasten its lips together with a safety pin, bind its limbs together and have the high priestess breathe life into it as we recite the correct incantations. No harm is wished her, beyond the impulse to keep her mouth shut.

Q: Why must witches be naked for the ceremonies?

A: We believe nothing should come between us and our god, that clothes are a form of deception or concealment, and that we must keep nothing from each other.

Q: Then why do you wear a robe or loin-cloth?

A: Witch law says that the elder of the coven must be apart. In the days when as many as fifty witches might attend a

meeting, it was necessary for the elder to be easily indentifiable. If he wore a robe, some of the witches who suffered from the cold claimed he had the advantage over them, hence the loin-cloth—a symbol of his difference but not a protection from the cold.

Q: Does it matter where coven meetings are held?

A: Not really, but the atmosphere outside is nearer to our religion, which, ideally, demands a place near running water or beneath trees.

Q: Is the growth of witchcraft, since the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1951, confined to Britain?

A: By no means. It is world-wide. We get requests from people all over Europe, Africa and America asking if we can give them a correspondence course. This is impossible, of course, but some actually come to England to be taught and initiated.

Q: Many?

A: Not more than a dozen a year, for it takes the best part of a year before they can be initiated. But there is a black market in some covens which accept foreign initiates who, for a consideration of £50 or more, get taught a travesty of the cult that is of no use to them whatever.

Q: When they are initiated properly, which god do they worship when they return to their own country?

A: There is only one god, but they are told to call him by the name of their regional folk-hero who was probably worshipped by their ancestors.

Q: As well as the black market you have just mentioned, are there any other abuses of witchcraft practised in covens?

A: Too many. One coven initiates its members with the use of an artificial phallus. This is nothing new to witchcraft; it was used centuries ago during fertility rites when witches swore they had relations with the devil—as they called the coven elder. They claimed that his member was cold, which was not surprising, for the women demanded that the elder lie with each one of them to ensure a good harvest, and the poor man was hard put to it to satisfy

so many. An artificial phallus was used, therefore, similar to the ones in existence in Egypt centuries before the birth of Christ. It was life-sized and made of stone. We deplore its use in these enlightened days. Another abuse I have discovered is the defloration of witches' daughters on the altar. It is neither necessary nor legal according to witch law.

Q: What is the greatest attraction of witchcraft to applicants for membership?

A: The ability to see into the future.

Q: But can all witches attain second sight?

A: Certainly. It takes time—perhaps six months—before they see their first vision in either a crystal or a bowl of ink, or even with the tarot cards. I have never known a witch fail to be clairvoyant within two years.

Q: Do visions always concern the witch or his petitioner?

A: No. Two years ago a London white witch saw in his crystal a child about to be ritually murdered in a Christian church. He convened an esbat and, with his coven's help, raised the power to find out where and when the ceremony was to take place. It was scheduled to be in a Roman Catholic church outside Rome two or three days hence. One of the members put up the money and three witches left immediately by plane. They arrived at the church to which they had been directed in time to see one of four priests take up a knife and approach the altar where a newly born baby was lying. Two nuns were standing by. The London witch snatched the knife from the priest and stabbed him in the throat, killing him. He and his companions were allowed to leave the church and no further action was taken although one had committed a murder. Enquiries showed that the ritual about to have been done was black witchcraft.

Q: But what is the difference between black witchcraft and black magic?

A: Very little. The former is done in the name of a god or a devil, while the latter is non-religious.

Q: Is either practised to any extent nowadays?

A: Both are, very much. People are still murdered by them, and unlike voodoo, the victim need not necessarily be told of the curse.

Q: What equipment does a witch require?

A: To begin with, nothing more than a simple robe and an athame—a black-handled knife. Before taking the second-grade initiation he must have the full regalia of eight weapons.

Q: Why are witches usually depicted as ugly old crones with broomsticks?

A: The broomstick is the phallic symbol, and witchcraft has always been primarily a fertility cult; the women were originally shown as being ugly because at first they were feared, and then ridiculed.

Q: In all the time that witchcraft has been worked, have there been no major victories?

A: Certainly. When the Armada was sighted in July 1588, witches all over Britain passed the word calling for a grand sabbath to combine their powers. While Drake was finishing his game of bowls, witches from far and wide were risking their lives to meet in small groups and conjure up the north-westerly gale that crippled the ships from the home of the Inquisitors.

More recently, when it was thought that the Germans would invade England in the Second World War, another grand sabbath was called. In the New Forest over four hundred witches met to celebrate the grand mass. To increase the potency of their power, they accepted the offer from some of the members to be willing sacrifices, for although our god demands none, it accepts voluntary victims as proof of their faith, as, I suppose, Jesus Christ accepts Christian martyrs. No witch was killed that night but many were scourged with real whips, and some sent out so much of their vital life-force into their familiars that they subsequently died. That week dense mists and fogs obscured the English Channel; the

invasion was called off. We believe it was due to witchcraft.

Q: You speak of familiars. In old witch trials it was said that they were in the form of dogs and cats. What are they really?

A: Familiar is our term for a concentration of power, drawn from the godhead or the central reservoir of power, and sent to do our will. To an experienced witch, a familiar looks like a ball or cone of fire. It is invisible to non-witches.

Q: Do politics play any part in witchcraft?

A: None whatever. I have no political bias; I never vote. By nature I am a royalist and I approve of orders of hierarchy. Politics are not taken into account when members join, but I know that we have amongst us Communists and Conservatives and all shades in between.

Q: Do your covens ever go against your wishes?

A: Yes. We are a democratic organization, and while I can advise on dogma, law and ritual, I have no power to demand obedience.

Q: Do you believe in all the visions you see in your crystal?

A: Of course. Sometimes I get the time factor wrong, but that is an error of interpretation.

Q: How does witchcraft overlap or intrude into the members' everyday life?

A: Witchcraft is a way of life; it affects everything we do or think. We try to wear the colours and metals recommended to us by the teachings, and we use the powers we have to help us in our work.

Q: What sort of people become witches?

A: Every sort. I have initiated clergymen, housewives, mechanics, doctors, businessmen, farmers, secretaries and teachers.

Q: Do you find a significant number of young 'hippies' turning to witchcraft? Do people try to use witchcraft to evolve a new order or a new form of society?

A: Some 'hippies' do give us a try, but as we ban the use of

drugs they either cease to be hippies or lose interest in us. Many try to adapt witchcraft to a new form of society but it never lasts long; we are essentially traditional and those who try to change us soon give up.

Q: Does witchcraft help people to cope with modern life?

A: Certainly. They use it to see into other people's minds and to bring themselves opportunities for advancement. And it provides a comprehensive social life.

Q: Does this mean that there is complete harmony in the covens?

A: Unfortunately no. There is as much bickering and back-biting among our members as among any other religious group.

Q: If witches develop the powers of clairvoyance as you say, why don't many of them set up as professional seers?

A: Some do, and it is permissible under our law, providing they don't make it known that they are using witchcraft. Many of the famous illusionists and magicians on the stage were not using sleight of hand but genuine witch magic. We believe that Houdini, who could extricate himself from a padlocked box sunk on a river-bed, was a witch.

Q: Do witches believe in life after death?

A: Not for everyone. Those who have fulfilled themselves, and all children, return to the central reservoir of power; those who have left work undone, have committed suicide or have had very unhappy lives are reincarnated on earth for another chance.

Q: What part do talismans play in witchcraft?

A: Only a little. Non-witches seem to have more need for them as 'good-luck' charms. Our speciality is the one for fertility, shaped like a tiny phallus. It has been used for hundreds of years, carved with the same mystic symbols, consecrated in the circle and worn round the petitioner's neck. Whether by psychology, luck or witchcraft, there must be a regiment of children who have been conceived while their mothers were wearing this witches' charm, as our files of thank-you letters show.

Q: Are non-witches grateful when you succeed in helping them?

A: Not all. If our spells work, they put it down to fate. If they fail, they say we are ineffective. Yet they often come back to have new problems solved.

Q: You call down power from the moon, but what will happen now that man has taken it over?

A: Nothing; the moon is symbolic, nothing else.

Q: Do the nude rites ever lead to orgies?

A: Not in my experience. Nudity soon loses its novelty, and most of us are more attractive to the opposite sex when we have a few clothes on. Remember, too, that we work hard in the circle and after three or four hours we are often extremely tired.

Q: How many requests for help are dealt with at each coven meeting?

A: Anything up to twenty.

Q: Is there any way that non-witches can identify witches?

A: Witches often wear large silver rings engraved with mystic symbols, and they always take leave of other witches with the words 'Blessed Be'.

Q: Is a witch precluded from joining other societies?

A: Certainly not. I am a Grand Prior of the Order of the Romaic Crescent, a Chevalier of the Military Order of the Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem and a Knight of the Imperial Constantinian Order of St George, all of which are Christian orders.

Q: To whom can would-be witches apply for membership?

A: To the witch centre when it is opened in the near future, and to me at the following address:

18 Carlow Row
Ringstead
Nr. Wellingborough
Northants

Appendix A

The Book of Shadows

The Law

1. The Law was made and ordained of old.
2. The Law was made for the Wicca, to advise and help in their troubles.
3. The Wicca should give due worship to the gods and obey their will, which they ordain, for it was made for the good of Wicca as the worship of the Wicca is good for the gods. For the gods love the brethern of Wicca.
4. As a man loveth a woman by mastering her,
5. So the Wicca should love the gods by being mastered by them.
6. And it is necessary that the Circle which is the temple of the gods, should be truly cast and purified. And that it may be a fit place for the gods to enter.
7. And the Wicca shall be properly prepared and purified to enter into the presence of the gods.
8. With love and worship in their hearts, they shall raise power from their bodies to give power to the gods.
9. As has been taught of old.
10. For in this way only may men have communion with the

gods, for the gods cannot help man without the help of man.

11. And the High Priestess shall rule her coven as the representative of the god.
12. And the High Priest shall support her as the representative of the god.
13. And the High Priestess shall choose whom she will, be he of sufficient rank, to be her High Priest.
14. For, as the god himself kissed her feet in the five-fold salute, laying his power at the feet of the goddess because of her youth and beauty, her sweetness and kindness, her wisdom and justice, her humility and generosity,
15. So he resigned all his power to her.
16. But the High Priestess should ever mind that all power comes from him.
17. It is only lent, to be used wisely and justly.
18. And the greatest virtue of a High Priestess be that she recognize that youth is necessary to the representative of the goddess.
19. So she will gracefully retire in favour of a younger woman should the Coven so decide in council.
20. For a true High Priestess realizes that gracefully surrendering pride of place is one of the greatest virtues.
21. And that thereby she will return to that pride of place in another life, with greater power and beauty.
22. In the old days, when witchdom extended far, we were free and worshipped in all the greater temples.
23. But in these unhappy times we must celebrate our sacred mysteries in secret.
24. So be it ordained, that none but the Wicca may see our mysteries, for our enemies are many and torture loosens the tongue of man.
25. So be it ordained that no Coven shall know where the next Coven bide.
26. Or who its members be, save only the Priest and Priestess and messenger.

27. And there shall be no communication between them, save by the messenger of the gods, or the summoner.
28. And only if it be safe may the Covens meet in some safe place for the great festivals.
29. And while there, none shall say whence they came nor give their true names.
30. To this end, any that are tortured in their agony may not tell if they do not know.
31. So be it ordained that no one shall tell anyone not of the craft who be of the Wicca, nor give any names or where they bide, or in any way tell anything which can betray any of us to our foes.
32. Nor may he tell where the Covendom be.
33. Or the Covenstead.
34. Or where the meetings be.
35. And if any break these laws, even under torture, THE CURSE OF THE GODDESS SHALL BE UPON THEM, so they may never be reborn on earth and may remain where they belong, in the hell of the Christians.
36. Let each High Priestess govern her Coven with justice and love, with the help and advice of the High Priest and the Elders, always heeding the advice of the messenger of the gods if he cometh.
37. She will heed all complaints of all Brothers and strive to settle all differences among them.
38. But it must be recognized that there will always be people who will ever strive to force others to do as they will.
39. These are not necessarily evil.
40. And they oft have good ideas and such ideas should be talked over in council.
41. But if they will not agree with their Brothers, or if they say,
42. 'I will not work under this High Priestess,'
43. It hath ever been the Old Law to be convenient to the Brethren and to avoid disputes.
44. Any of the third may claim to found a new Coven

- because they live over a league away from the Covenstead, or that they are about to do so.
45. Anyone living within the Covendom and wishing to form a new Coven, shall tell the Elders of their intention, and on the instant avoid their dwelling and remove to the new Covendom.
46. Members of the old Coven may join the new one when it is formed. But if they do, they must utterly avoid the old Coven.
47. The Elders of the new and the old Covens should meet in peace and brotherly love to decide the new boundaries.
48. Those of the craft who dwell outside both Covendoms may join either but not both,
49. Though all may, if the Elders agree, meet for the great festivals if it be truly in peace and brotherly love,
50. But splitting the Coven off means strife, so for this reason these Laws were made of old and may the CURSE OF THE GODDESS BE ON ANY WHO DISREGARD THEM. So be it ordained.
51. If you would keep a book, let it be in your own hand of write. Let brothers and sisters copy what they will, but never let the book out of your hands, and never keep the writings of another.
52. For if it be found in their hand of write, they may be taken and arraigned.
53. Let each guard his own writings and destroy them whenever danger threatens.
54. Learn as much as you may by heart and, when danger is past, rewrite your book, an it be safe.
55. For this reason, if any die, destroy their book an they have not been able to.
56. For, an it be found, 'tis clear proof against them.
57. And our oppressors know well 'Ye may not be a witch alone'.
58. So all their kin and friends be in danger of torture,
59. So destroy everything not necessary.

60. If your book be found on you, 'tis clear proof against you alone, you may be arraigned.
61. Keep all thoughts of the craft from your mind.
62. If the torture be too great to bear, say, 'I will confess. I cannot bear this torture. What do you want me to say?'
63. If they try to make you speak of the Brotherhood, do not.
64. But if they try to make you speak of impossibilities such as flying through the air, consorting with a Christian devil or sacrificing children, or eating men's flesh,
65. To obtain relief from torture say, 'I had an evil dream, I was beside myself, I was crazed.'
66. Not all magistrates are bad, if there be an excuse, they may show mercy.
67. If you have confessed ought, deny it afterwards, say you babbled under torture, say you knew not what you said.
68. If you are condemned, fear not.
69. The Brotherhood is powerful and will help you to escape if you stand steadfast, but if you betray ought there is no hope for you in this life or in that to come.
70. Be sure, if steadfast you go to the pyre, drugs will reach you, you will feel naught. You go to death and what lies beyond, the ecstasy of the goddess.
71. To avoid discovery, let the working tools be as ordinary things that any may have in their houses.
72. Let the pentacles be of wax so that they may be broken at once or melted.
73. Have no sword unless your rank allows it.
74. Have no names or signs on anything.
75. Write the names and signs on them in ink before consecrating them and wash it off immediately afterwards.
76. Let the colour of the hilts tell which is which.
77. Do not bigrave* them unless they cause discovery.
78. Ever remember ye are the hidden children of the goddess so never do anything to disgrace them or her.
79. Never boast, never threaten, never say you would wish ill of anyone.

* engrave

80. If any person not in the Circle, speak of the craft, say, 'Speak not to me of such, it frightens me, tis evil luck to speak of it.'
81. For this reason, the Christians have their spies everywhere. These speak as if they were well affected to us, as if they wouldn't come into our meetings, saying, 'My mother used to worship the Old Ones. I would I could go myself.'
82. To such as these, ever deny all knowledge.
83. But to others, ever say, 'Tis foolish men talk of witches flying through the air. To do so they must be as light as thistledown. And men say that witches all be blear-eyed old crones, so what pleasure can there be at a witch meeting such as folks talk on?'
84. And say, 'Many wise men now say there be no such creatures.'
85. Ever make it a jest, and in some future time perhaps, the persecution may die and we may worship our gods in safety again.
86. Let us all pray for that happy day.
87. May the blessings of the goddess and god be on all who keep these Laws which are ordained.
88. If the craft hath any appanage, let all guard it and help to keep it clear and good for the craft.
89. And let all justly guard all monies of the craft.
90. And if any Brother truly wrought it, tis right they have their pay, an it be just. An this be not taking money for the art, but for good and honest work.
91. And even the Christians say, 'The labourer is worthy of his hire,' but if any Brother work willingly for the good of the craft without pay, tis but to their greater honour. So be it ordained.
92. If there be any dispute or quarrel among the Brethren, the High Priestess shall straightly convene the Elders and enquire into the matter, and they shall hear both sides, first alone and then together.

93. And they shall decide justly, not favouring one side or the other.
94. Ever recognizing there be people who can never agree to work under others.
95. But at the same time, there be some people who cannot rule justly.
96. To those who ever must be chief, there is one answer.
97. Void the Coven or seek another one, or make a Coven of your own, taking with you those who will go.
98. To those who cannot, justly the answer be, 'Those who cannot bear your rule will leave with you.'
99. For none may come to meetings with those whom they are at variance.
100. So, an either cannot agree, get hence, for the craft must ever survive, so be it ordained.
101. In the olden days when we had power, we could use the art against any who ill-treated the Brotherhood. But in these evil days we must not do so. For our enemies have devised a burning pit of everlasting fire into which they say their god casteth all the people who worship him, except it be the very few who are released by their priests, spells and masses. And this be chiefly by giving monies and rich gifts to receive his favour for their great god is ever in need of money.
102. But as our gods need our aid to make fertility for man and crops, so is the god of the Christians ever in need of man's help to search out and destroy us. Their priests ever tell them that any who get our help are damned to this hell forever, so men be mad with the terror of it.
103. But they make men believe that they may escape this hell if they give victims to the tormentors. So for this reason all be forever spying, thinking, 'An I can catch but one of these Wicca, I will escape from this fiery pit.'
104. So for this reason we have our hidels, and men searching long and not finding, say, 'There be none, or if there be, they be in a far country.'
105. But when one of our oppressors die, or even be sick,

- ever is the cry, 'This be witches' malice', and the hunt is up again. And though they slay ten of their own to one of ours, still they care not. They have countless thousands.
106. While we are few indeed. So be it ordained.
 107. That none shall use the art in any way to do ill to any.
 108. However much they injure us, harm none. And nowtimes many believe we exist not.
 109. That this Law shall ever continue to help us in our plight, no one, however great an injury or injustice they receive, may use the art in any way to do ill, or harm any. But they may, after great consultations with all, use the art to restrain Christians from harming us Brothers, but only to constrain them and never to punish.
 110. To this end men will say, 'Such a one is a mighty searcher out, and a persecutor of old women when they desire to be witches, and none hath done him harm, so it be proof that they cannot or more truly there be none.'
 111. For all know full well that so many folk have died because someone had a grudge against them, or were persecuted because they had money or goods to seize, or because they had none to bribe the searchers. And many have died because they were scolding old women. So much that men now say that only old women are witches.
 112. And this be to our advantage and turns suspicion away from us.
 113. In England and Scotland 'tis now many a year since a witch hath died the death. But any misuse of the power might raise the persecution again.
 114. So never break this Law, however much you are tempted, and never consent to its being broken in the least.
 115. If you know it is being broken, you must work strongly against it.
 116. And any High Priestess or High Priest who consents to its breach must immediately be deposed for 'tis the blood of the Brethren they endanger.

117. Do good, an it be safe, and only if it be safe.
118. And strictly keep to the Old Law.
119. Never accept money for the use of the art, for money ever smeareth the taker. 'Tis sorcerers and conjurors and the priests of the Christians who ever accept money for the use of their arts. And they sell pardons to let men escape from their sins.
120. Be not as these. If you accept no money, you will be free from temptation to use the art for evil causes.
121. All may use the art for their own advantage or for the advantage of the craft only if you are sure you harm none.
122. But ever let the Coven debate this at length. Only if all are satisfied that none may be harmed, may the art be used.
123. If it is not possible to achieve your ends one way, perchance the aim may be achieved by acting in a different way so as to harm none. MAY THE CURSE OF THE GODDESS BE UPON ANY WHO BREAKETH THIS LAW. So be it ordained.
124. 'Tis judged lawful if ever any of the craft need a house or land and none will sell, to incline the owner's mind so as to be willing to sell, provided it harmeth him not in any way and the full price is paid without haggling.
125. Never bargain or cheapen anything whilst you buy by the art. So be it ordained.
126. 'Tis the Old Law and the most important of all laws, that no one may do anything which will endanger any of the craft, or bring them into contact with the law of the land or any persecutors.
127. In any dispute between the Brethren, no one may invoke any laws but those of the craft.
128. Or any tribunal but that of the Priestess, Priest and Elders.
129. It is not forbidden to say as Christians do, 'There be witchcraft in the land,' because our oppressors of old make it heresy not to believe in witchcraft and so a crime to deny it which thereby puts you under suspicion.

130. But ever say, 'I know not of it here, perchance there may be but afar off, I know not where.'
131. But ever speak of them as old crones, consorting with the devil and riding through the air.
132. And ever say, 'But how may many ride the air if they be not as light as thistledown.'
133. But the curse of the goddess be on any who cast suspicion on any of the Brotherhood.
134. Or who speak of any real meeting-place or where they bide.
135. Let the craft keep books with the names of all herbs which are good, and all cures so all may learn.
136. But keep another book with all Bills and Apices and let only the Elders and other trustworthy people have this knowledge. So be it ordained.
137. And may the blessings of the gods be on all who keep these Laws, and the curses of both the god and the goddess be on all who break them.
138. Remember the art is the secret of the gods and may only be used in earnest and never for show or vainglory.
139. Magicians and Christians may taunt us saying, 'You have no power, show us your power. Do magic before our eyes, then only will we believe,' seeking to cause us to betray the art before them.
140. Heed them not, for the art is holy and may only be used in need, and the curse of the gods be on any who break this Law.
141. It ever be the way with women and with men also, that they ever seek new love.
142. Nor should we reprove them for this.
143. But it may be found a disadvantage to the craft.
144. And so many a time it has happened that a High Priest or a High Priestess, impelled by love, hath departed with their love. That is, they have left the Coven.
145. Now if the High Priestess wishes to resign, she may do so in full Coven.
146. And this resignation is valid.

147. But if they should run off without resigning, who may know if they may not return in a few months?
148. So the Law is, if a High Priestess leaves her Coven, she be taken back and all be as before.
149. Meanwhile, if she has a deputy, that deputy shall act as High Priestess for as long as the High Priestess is away.
150. If she returns not at the end of a year and a day, then shall the Coven elect a new High Priestess.
151. Unless there is a good reason to the contrary.
152. The person who has done the work shall reap the benefit of the reward, maiden and deputy of the High Priestess.
153. It had been found that practising the art doth cause a fondness between aspirant and tutor, and it is the cause of better results if this be so.
154. And if for any reason this be undesirable, it can easily be avoided by both persons from the outset firmly resolving in their minds to be as brother and sister, or parent and child.
155. And it is for this reason that a man may be taught only by a woman and a woman by a man, and women and women should not attempt these practices together. So be it ordained.
156. Order and discipline must be kept.
157. A High Priestess or a High Priest may, and should, punish all faults.
158. To this end all the craft must receive correction willingly.
159. All properly prepared, the culprit kneeling should be told his fault and his sentence pronounced.
160. Punishment should be followed by something amusing.
161. The culprit must acknowledge the justice of the punishment by kissing the hand on receiving sentence and again thanking for punishment received. So be it ordained.

NOTE: Many of the laws are archaic and more suited to the sixteenth than the twentieth century, and since Alex Sanders was appointed King, he has agreed to many being tacitly dropped. No. 25, ordering that no coven must know the whereabouts of the next, which caused so much difficulty when he was searching for witches, was the first to go.

Rule 82, ordering witches to deny all knowledge of the craft, is still contested. Alex maintains it should be scrapped, but there are many witches in Britain who will have nothing to do with his movement because he disregards this rule. Some believe that talking about one's powers diminishes them, but Alex and his followers put this down to superstition.

Appendix B

The Witches' Calendar

The witches' year begins at midnight on 20 December when the cauldron is wreathed with holly, ivy and mistletoe and the ritual symbolizes the rebirth of the sun.

Candlemas, on 1 February, is devoted to mass initiations.

The Spring Equinox on 20 March is the major fertility sabbath.

Beltane, or May Eve Sabbath, on 30 April, another fertility sabbath but not so important as the Equinox.

Midsummer night festival, the Summer Solstice, is on 21 June and is a social occasion when witches from some distance band together.

August Eve or Lammas festival begins on 31 July and is primarily concerned with making spells to ensure a good harvest of crops, stock or money.

The Autumn Equinox, on 20 September, is the equivalent of the Christian harvest festival. Home-grown or home-made produce is brought but none is eaten; it is delivered anonymously to poor or sick people—usually non-witches—whose names have been put forward by members of the coven.

Hallowe'en, on 31 October, is the night when witches

can ask for the souls of the dead to manifest themselves or give messages.

In addition to the eight sabbaths when covens welcome visiting witches to the ceremony, there are esbats, that is, working meetings of each coven, on the night of every full moon. These vary little from month to month and begin with the high priest and high priestess sweeping round the circle with their broomsticks to exorcize the area of other influences. While everyone chants incantations, the circle is formed and set up with symbols for the guardians of the watchtowers and incense burners. Within the circle the altar is set up and laid with the witch weapons, with bowls of consecrated salt and water, and fresh flowers. The first invocations are made to bring the power, and the high priest says, 'Listen to the words of the great mother who was of old also called among men Artemis, Diana, Aphrodite, Arianrod and by many other names.

'At my altar, whenever you have need of anything, once a month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me who am queen of all the witches. There shall ye assemble. Ye shall be free from slavery, naked in your rites, sing, feast and dance. My law is love unto all beings. Mine is the cup of the wine of life. I am the gracious goddess who gives the gift of joy unto all men.

'I am the soul of nature who giveth life to the whole universe.

'I am that which is attained at the end of desire.'

While all the witches squat just within the circle, the high priest kneels before the high priestess in the centre and says, 'Hail, Aradia, pour forth thy love. I lowly bow before thee, I adore thee to the end, with loving sacrifice thy shrine adorn. Thy foot is to my lips, my prayer is borne upon the rising incense smoke. Then spend thy mighty love, O mighty One, descend to aid me who, without thee, am forlorn.'

As he rises, the high priestess raises her athame to draw down the power from the moon, while the others join hands

and, keeping within the perimeter of the circle, dance round gathering speed and chanting:

Darksome night and shining moon,
East then south then west then north,
Hearken to the witches' rune,
Here I come to call thee forth.
Earth and water, air and fire,
Wand and pentacle and sword,
Work ye unto my desire.
Hearken ye unto my word.
Cords and censer, scourge and knife,
Powers of the witches' blade,
Waken all ye unto life,
Come ye as the charm is made.

Queen of heaven, queen of hell,
Horned hunter of the night,
Lend your power unto the spell,
And work my will by magic rite.
By all the power of land and sea,
By all the might of moon and sun,
As I do will, so it shall be,
Chant the spell and be it done.
Eko, Eko Azarak,
Eko, Eko Zamilak,
Eko, Eko Cernunnos,
Eko, Eko Aradia.

During the invocation the high priestess stands at one side and at the moment when she believes the power has come, she calls 'Now' and the witches fall to the ground.

Spells are made, magic is worked, and they end the esbat with the mass, which is a meal taken by all within the circle.

NOTE: This is the form of meeting practised in Alex Sanders's covens and taught to him by his grandmother.

Appendix C

Initiation Ceremonies

The first-grade initiate, who will have received instruction for some weeks before he is called to the initiation ceremony, is sent to have a bath. In his absence the circle is made and the rest of the coven are within the circle. The initiate is blindfolded and naked. He is led by two other witches to the edge of the circle where he is given the opportunity of changing his mind and withdrawing. If he decides he still wants to be a witch, those inside the circle dance round singing the chant 'Eko, Eko Azarak' which is sung in all esbats.

The high priest, clad in a red velvet robe—he is the only witch allowed to be dressed—stands before the altar and proclaims he is the elder. Giving his secret witch name, he recites the proclamation in Runic, of which he understands only part. He outstretches his arms and legs to represent the pillars of life; his trunk is the tree of life, and his arms mercy and justice.

Beside him the high priestess, holding her sword above her head, invokes the power while all the other witches sit and face her. As she speaks, two male witches go to the initiate and bind his hands behind his back with cord, one end of which is then tied to his ankles. He knows he has to keep

perfectly still at this moment for the high priestess goes towards him holding out her sword so that it touches his left breast. Holding it still, she says, 'Oh, thou who standeth on the threshold of the dread lords of the outer spaces, hast thou the courage to make the assay?' She presses the sword against him, adding, 'For I say verily, it were better to rush on my blade and perish than to make the attempt with fear in thy heart.'

With the response he has been taught, he says, 'I have two perfect words, perfect love and perfect trust.'

Replying, 'All who have are doubly welcome,' she leads him into the circle, lays her sword on the floor, then puts her arms around him and gives him the witches' secret embrace which, like the masonic handclasp, acts as an 'Open, Sesame' to other initiates.

'I am now going to give you a third password to pass you through the dread door,' she says, and kisses him on the lips.

While he stands, still bound and blindfold but now inside the circle, she takes her athame from the altar and describes a circle with it, sealing the gap through which he has just walked. With one arm about his waist, she leads him to each of the four watchtowers, east, south, west and north, saying, 'Take heed, ye lords of the watchtowers, that X [giving his new witch name] is properly prepared to be made a priest and a witch.'

At this point all the witches rise and, holding hands, form a circle so that the initiate is between the high priest and the high priestess, who hold his elbows tightly as they all whirl round chanting 'Eko, Eko Azarak' to raise the cone of power.

When the others sit down, the initiate, still blindfolded, is led to stand with his back to the altar while the high priestess says, 'In other religions, the postulate kneels while the priest towers above him, but in the magical art we are taught to be humble and so we kneel to welcome them.' Kneeling, she kisses his feet and says, 'Blessed be thy feet that have brought thee in these ways.'

She then kisses him just above his knees and says, 'Blessed be thy knees that shall kneel at the sacred altar.'

She kisses him just above his pubic hair and says, 'Blessed be thy phallus without which we would not be.'

While she kisses his breast she says, 'Blessed be thy breast formed in beauty and in strength.' She then presses the full length of her body against him and kisses him on the mouth, saying, 'Blessed be thy lips that shall utter the sacred names.'

Standing back a pace, she asks him, 'Before thou art sworn, art thou willing to pass the ordeal and be purified?' When he affirms that he is, she takes the cord which is tied to his left ankle and uses it to bind both his feet together loosely, signifying the freedom of a recruit to leave and shake off his bonds if he wishes to. When he keeps still, confirming once again that he is willing to be sworn in, she takes a length of thick silk and takes his measure from the crown of his head to the souls of his feet.

In olden times, and in some covens even today, this measure is retained by the high priest and if the initiate tries to break free from the coven, the witches cut pieces from it and make curses designed to destroy him. Alex Sanders follows the ritual exactly but will not use his powers against the members of the coven. After taking the measure he gives it to the initiate and tells him either to burn it immediately or keep it in a safe place where no one else can get it.

The high priest strikes a bell three times to call attention to watch the scourging. The recruit has to kneel before the altar, his forehead on the ground, while he is whipped on the buttocks. According to the ritual, a real whip should be used for the forty strokes. Alex uses a silver whip with thongs of embroidery silk, but some covens use thongs of shoe laces which can leave permanent scars.

On the last stroke, the high priestess says, 'You have bravely passed the test, art ready to swear that thou wilt always be true to the art and ever ready to protect, help and defend thy brothers and sisters of the Wicca, even though it should cost thee thy life?' When he replies that he is, he is told to say,

'I, [then his witch name], in the presence of the mighty ones, do of my own free will and accord most solemnly swear that I will ever keep secret and never reveal the secrets of the art except it be to a proper person, properly prepared within a circle such as I am now in.

'All this I swear by my hopes of a future life, mindful that my measure has been taken and may my weapons turn against me if I break my solemn oath.'

Two male witches help him to rise. The high priestess takes a small bowl of consecrated oil and, with her thumb, anoints him, making three points of a triangle from each breast to his pelvis. She repeats the acts with a dish of wine, and then kisses the three places. After removing his blindfold and cords, she kisses him and picks up her sword. Seven other witches each take a weapon from the altar, ready to pass to the high priestess so that she, in turn, can hand it to the initiate. He passes them back to her and she replaces them on the altar.

'I now present you with the working tools of a witch. They are also the magic weapons. First, the magic sword. With this thou canst form all magic circles, dominate, subdue, and punish all rebellious spirits and demons and even persuade angels and good spirits. With this in your hand you are the ruler of the circle.

'Next I present the athame, this is the true witches' weapon and has all the power of the magic sword.

'Next I present the white-handled knife. Its use is to form all instruments used in the art. It can only be used in a magic circle.

'Next I present the wand. Its use is to call up and control certain angels and genie to whom it would not be meet to use the sword or athame.

'Next I present the pentacle. This is for the purpose of calling up the appropriate spirits.

'Next I present the censer of incense. This is used to encourage and welcome good spirits and to banish evil spirits.

'Next I present the scourge. This is a sign of power and domination. It is also used to cause purification and enlighten-

ment for it is written, "To learn we must suffer and be purified."

'Are you willing to suffer to learn?'

The initiate replies that he is.

'Next and lastly I present the cords. They are of use to bind the symbols of the art, also they are necessary in the oath. I now salute thee in the name of Karnayna and Aradia, newly made priest and witch.'

She hands him an athame that will be his to keep, and leads him to the four watchtowers, her left arm around his waist and her right hand on his right hand which is raised, holding the athame pointing upwards, while she says, 'Hear ye, mighty ones of the watchtowers, X [giving his name] has been consecrated a priest of the goddess.'

They all sit in a circle, the initiate beside the high priest in the place of honour. The high priest, on his knees, is given a cup of wine by the high priestess who then plunges her athame into it and says, 'As the athame is to the male, so the cup is to the female, and when they are joined they become one in truth.'

They partake of the cakes and wine—communion with their god—and the ceremony ends.

The ritual by which a first-grade witch becomes a second-grader lasts several hours during which each member of the coven enacts part of a mystery play which tells the history of witchcraft from its earliest days. Before the initiate can present himself for the upgrading, he must master the techniques of clairvoyance and raising the power. He must also have collected a set of the eight witches' weapons. Some covens still follow the ancient rule that the witch must forge the tools, carve the handles and engrave them by his own hand, but Alex Sanders allows his witches to buy antique weapons, so long as they do their own engraving. This is done by covering the metal surface with wax on which is drawn the symbol with the point of a knife. Corrosive acid is poured over the wax and it bites into the metal where the knife has drawn its

designs. The average time for a first-grade witch to learn the techniques of witchcraft and collect the weapons is about two years. Those who cannot afford the cost—anything between £10 and £100—are helped from coven funds.

A second-grade witch is taught to conjure up familiars and help the elders to train first-grade witches. As soon as the coven exceeds thirteen, the second-graders are allowed to form a new coven of their own to which they can invite three or four from the old coven to form a nucleus.

A further two years of training is usually necessary before the third—and final—grade is taken. Alex insists that only those married or about to be married can take this grade, and as men and women witches frequently marry each other, it is from these that the third-graders are chosen.

The man and woman initiates enter the magic circle and all the other witches are ordered to turn about, facing outwards so they cannot witness the proceedings within the circle. Wearing a veil fastened lightly to her necklace and extending to her knees, the girl must lie on her back with arms and legs outstretched in the pentacle, or five-pointed star position. The five points are her extremities and her head, and correspond with the elements of earth, air, fire, water and the power that rules them all. She is, symbolically, a living cauldron. All the lights are extinguished except for three candles on the altar. In olden times, when the altar was seven foot square, she would lie upon it, but now that the ceremony is usually held indoors, she lies on the floor.

After banishing the power that has been invoked to consecrate the couple, the elder who officiates tells everyone to leave the room. He goes to the altar and turns his back on the couple while he reads the ritual which gives instructions for the male to remove the woman's veil and give her the five-fold salute of kisses on various parts of her body.

The high priest invokes the erection of the sacred pillars of life and draws down the power to enter the couple and make them one.

The man and woman now represent the sun and the moon,

and as mortals are not supposed to witness the sun and the moon in conjunction—hence the fear in olden times of watching an eclipse—the elder must keep his back to them and walk round the circle and out of the room while the couple remain within the circle.

The couple have sexual relations and, in the eyes of the witches, this is just as much a marriage as the handfasting ceremony. After half an hour or so, the couple wash and dry themselves with the consecrated water and towels left in the circle, put on the new robes awaiting them, and call in the rest of the coven for the mass.

Appendix D

The Magic of Matter

Witches believe that matter exudes emanations that can affect people in the way that ultra-violet rays and X-rays operate. This transference of energy can, they maintain, be harnessed according to the time of the year when they are born, and initiates are presented with a list of materials supposed to have sympathetic magic for each of the twelve signs of the zodiak, and are advised to be guided by it. They are:

AQUARIUS the water bearer. 22 January to 21 February.
Lucky stones: zircon, garnet, ruby, jet, black onyx.
Lucky number: two. Lucky day: Saturday.
Lucky flowers: snowdrop and foxglove. Lucky tree: pine.
Animal: dog. Bird: cuckoo. Metal: platinum.
Colours: electric blue, electric green.

PISCES the fishes. 22 February to 21 March.
Lucky stones: sapphire, emerald, amethyst, coral.
Lucky numbers: Pisces, six; Jupiter and Neptune both three.
Lucky day: Thursday. Flower: heliotrope. Trees: willow, elm.
Animals: sheep and ox. Birds: swan and stork. Metal: tin.
Colours: purple, mauve, sea-green.

ARIES the ram. 22 March to 21 April.

Lucky stones: ruby, bloodstone, diamond.

Lucky numbers: Aries, seven; Mars, nine. Lucky day: Tuesday.

Flowers: gorse, wild rose, thistle. Trees: holly, thorn, chestnut.

Animals: ram, tiger, leopard. Bird: magpie. Metal: iron.

Colours: bright green, pink, yellow, red, white.

TAURUS the bull. 22 April to 21 May.

Lucky stones: sapphire, emerald, turquoise, lapis lazuli, moss agate.

Lucky numbers: six for both Taurus and Venus.

Lucky day: Friday.

Flowers: lily-of-the-valley, violet, rose, myrtle.

Trees: almond, apple, walnut, ash, sycamore.

Animal: bull. Bird: dove. Metal: copper.

Colours: all shades of blue, indigo, soft rose.

GEMINI the twins. 22 May to 21 June.

Lucky stones: agate, chrysoprase, diamond, jade.

Lucky number: five. Lucky day: Wednesday.

Flower: snapdragon. Trees: elder and filbert.

Animals: dog and squirrel. Birds: parrot and linnet.

Metal: quicksilver. Colours: white, silver, yellow, light green.

CANCER the crab. 22 June to 21 July.

Lucky stones: emerald, moonstone, cat's eye, pearl.

Lucky numbers: Cancer, two; Moon, seven. Lucky day: Monday.

Flowers: poppy, water-lily. Trees: willow, sycamore.

Animals: otter, seal. Birds: seagull, owl. Metal: silver.

Colours: emerald green, white.

LEO the lion. 22 July to 21 August.

Lucky stones: amber, topaz, sardonyx, ruby.

Lucky numbers: Leo, four; Sun, one. Lucky day: Sunday.
Flowers: marigold, sunflower, cowslip, heliotrope.
Trees: palm laurel. Animal: lion. Birds: cock, eagle.
Metal: gold.
Colours: gold, orange, yellow, green, white.

VIRGO the virgin. 22 August to 21 September.
Lucky stones: cornelian, jade, diamond, jasper.
Lucky numbers: Virgo, ten; Mercury, five. Lucky day:
Wednesday.
Flowers: madonna lily, cornflower, valerian. Tree: hazel.
Animal: squirrel. Birds: parrot, magpie.
Metals: Virgo, platinum; Mercury, quicksilver.
Colours: pale blue, pale gold, yellow, jade green.

LIBRA the scales. 22 September to 21 October.
Lucky stones: Libra, opal; Venus, lapis lazuli.
Lucky numbers: Libra, eight; Venus, six. Lucky day:
Friday.
Flowers: violet, white rose. Trees: almond, walnut.
Animals: hart, hare. Bird: dove. Metal: copper.
Colours: blue, violet.

SCORPIO the scorpion. 22 October to 21 November.
Lucky stones: ruby, beryl, turquoise, topaz.
Lucky number: nine. Lucky day: Tuesday.
Flowers: heather, chrysanthemum. Trees: holly, thorn.
Animals: wolf, panther. Birds: eagle, vulture.
Metal: iron.
Colours: red, russet, brown.

SAGITTARIUS the archer. 22 November to 21 December.
Lucky stones: Sagittarius, sapphire; Jupiter, amethyst.
Lucky numbers: Sagittarius, four; Jupiter, three.
Lucky day: Thursday.
Flowers: carnation, wallflower. Trees: mulberry, vine.
Animal: horse. Bird: eagle. Metal: tin.
Colours: orange, mauve, purple.

CAPRICORN the goat. 22 December to 21 January.
Lucky stones: Capricorn, onyx; Saturn, obsidian, jet.
Lucky numbers: Capricorn, three; Saturn, eight.
Lucky day: Saturday. Flowers: nightshade, rose.
Trees: pine, cypress, yew. Animals: dog, elephant.
Bird: owl. Metal: lead.
Colours: black, grey, violet.

Luck is believed by witches to work both ways, e.g. buried treasure presents danger to the finder if protective wishes or curses were buried with it.